SELECTIONS FROM TRUE STORY CLASSICS

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PREFACE

The greatest literature of every land is its folk literature—those stories of everyday men and women that strike deeply into the chords of recognition. It is the revelation of the joys, the sorrows, the strivings, the sacrifices, the successes and the heroisms of people like ourselves that move us most and entertain us best.

And never before in the history of the world's literature have stories of the *people* come to the *people* so directly, so undiluted, so honestly, so true, as in TRUE STORY Magazine—a magazine which is written by its readers; the dramatic diary of ten million souls.

Here in the *True Story Classics* are gathered together not those stories which some individual has thought the best, but those stories which the great host of TRUE STORY Magazine readers have indicated by their letters, to be the most entertaining, the most interesting, the most helpful and the most inspiring.

The reader will understand that only a few such chapters of private lives can be included in the limited space of this book, and, in the selection of such stories, the publisher's aim has been to avoid including stories that may already be familiar to the majority of the readers.

Most books are published to be read but once. Of the tens of thousands of ordinary volumes that come off the presses every year, few will bear second reading, fewer a third. But *True Story Classics* can be read again and again, for these stories make up a virtual history of life; illuminating every human emotion and every human relationship.

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I

Two Men in My Life

OMETIMES, during the past few months, I have wondered if any woman ever before was called upon to face as peculiar a problem as has been mine. The complications of this problem were brought about by what, I suppose, you Americans would call "a youthful indiscretion." Yet when I look the word "indiscretion" up in my little, well-worn English dictionary, I find that it means "carelessness of consequences." Somehow that doesn't seem to apply in my case.

First of all let it be understood that I am a French girl whose early training was far, far different from that of the average American girl, whom I greatly admire for her achievements.

Also let it be understood that if there had been no war, my own story might have been very different. Although the war has been over for eight years, the debts which it contracted will be a burden for many years to come. And in many parts of the world may be found thousands of women, who, although they bear no physical scars of battle upon their bodies, are yet paying their share of the great war debt in anguish and suffering. Is it not so?

I am one of these women. Sometimes it seems that my own payment has been unjustly heavy. Not only did I suffer during the period of the war itself, and in many ways for a long time after, but it was only a few months ago that Mars, the god of war, reached his bony hand from the past and made me face this problem which has brought the

most acute anguish of all. But I must tell the story as it happened.

My childhood home was a small village situated on the Loire river in the beautiful château region of France. Father was a sculptor of considerable renown but he had been embittered by the death of my mother at my birth and withdrew from any contact with the outside world.

We lived in an old brick house with a large and beautiful garden at the back surrounded by a high brick wall. My only companions were Julie, our maid-of-all-work, and Miss Holly, my English governess, from whom I learned to speak and write English at an early age.

I was a very lonely little girl, much given to odd fancies. Father paid little attention to me and was always busy with his sculptor's tools. One day he decided to use me for a model, much to my joy. The result, the nude figure of a sleeping child in marble, may to-day be seen prominently displayed in one of the art galleries of Paris.

Only one visitor ever came to our home. It was Dr. Bouchard, the village physician, who still maintained his friendship with father. He was a stout, elderly little man with gray hair and goatee, a round, jolly-looking face, and twinkling eyes. He always had a package of bonbons for me and I loved him devotedly.

Those mentioned constituted my entire list of acquaintances up to the time I was about nine years old. One memorable day, as usual, I was playing alone in the garden. Suddenly from nowhere, apparently, a rubber ball fell with a great splash into the center of a little pool where water lilies grew.

As I gazed at it in astonishment, I heard a soft voice call, "Mademoiselle!" Turning around quickly, I saw a small boy wearing a velvet cap, peering over the top of the garden wall. "Will you please return the ball, mademoiselle?" he pleaded.

I endeavored to comply with the request, but was unable to reach the ball. He scrambled over the wall and we managed to retrieve it together. That was the beginning of my friendship with Victor de la Boyer, grandson and heir of the venerable Count de la Boyer whose great château on the hill frowned down upon the village. The grounds of this estate adjoined on one side the more modest home of my father.

Somehow we met often after that. Victor was the first playmate I had ever had. He, too, was a lonely child, an orphan who was obliged to create his own amusements, as was my lot. His grandfather was an invalid, and his tutor, an elderly old professor, left him pretty much to his own devices after lesson hours.

All of our childish cunning was employed in arranging meetings so we could play together. And, strange as it may appear, never once were we detected. And never, I am sure, were ever two children more devoted to each other.

One day, when father was away, I managed to smuggle Victor in to have a look at the studio. He was much impressed by what he saw there and from that time on his ambition was firmly fixed. He, too, was going to be a sculptor, and some day, he declared, I should be his wife and live with him in Paris. Of this wondrous city he had been told much by his tutor. He was thirteen years old at that time and I was ten.

When he was sixteen he was sent away to an exclusive preparatory school, and a little later, I entered a convent school. We did not see each other again for nearly three years.

Then the war came. Father was among the first from our village to march away to the defense of his country. The convent which I was attending, being situated in Alsace-Lorraine, was in the danger zone, and I came home to pursue my studies with Miss Holly.

Time dragged wearily. Father was wounded and was taken to a hospital in Amiens. Then Miss Holly was called to England to care for a sister who had been injured in an air raid. I was left alone in the house with only Julie to keep me company.

Then came that event which was to change the course of my whole life.

I had retired early one evening but could not sleep. I was sad and lonely and filled with all sorts of forebodings. Finally after two or three hours of troubled tossing, I arose and threw open the shutters of my bedroom window. For a long time I stood there in a strange reverie gazing at the beauties of the night. The soft rays of the moon made our garden a place of enchantment.

Abruptly my reverie was broken and fear clutched at my heart. A man was climbing over the garden wall! And I was alone in the house with only Julie, a slow-witted creature whom nothing short of an earthquake could rouse from her slumbers.

The figure jumped to the ground, and came forward.

It was Victor! I gave a sigh of relief. He was calling me. I stood enthralled as I gazed down upon him. He was garbed in uniform, and came striding across the garden.

"Celeste," he exclaimed joyfully. "Is it truly you?"

"Yes, it truly is, Victor," I replied no less joyfully. "But when did you get here and what are you doing in our garden at this hour of the night? Are you a burglar?"

He laughed softly. "I was just going to slip a message for you under your door. I arrived a few hours ago and must leave on an early train in the morning. What luck to find you. Can't you come down? I am so anxious to see you and there is so much to talk about."

"I am very, very glad to see you, Victor," I said with sincerity. "One minute and I shall be right down."

Dressing hastily I soon joined him in the garden. Victor

gazed at me in the moonlight with a look in which tenderness and admiration were blended in a manner which strangely thrilled me.

"How beautiful you have become, Celeste," he murmured. "Why, you are a real grown-up lady now. No, not merely a lady, but a goddess—the fairy queen who has always reigned in this garden."

We walked over and sat down on an old stone bench underneath the drooping willow tree by the lily pond. Very handsome he looked in his trim uniform. He was to leave at once for the front, he told me. Then suddenly I realized that I didn't want him to go, that he meant more to me than anything else in the world.

But to Victor the war was but an incident of life. Soon it would be finished, he said, and then—his career.

"I am still determined that some day I shall be a sculptor, Celeste," he declared. "The world will soon tire of this hideous business of war and give greater honors to those who can create beauty. And you shall be my inspiration always. My darling, I want you for my wife."

His wife! It was a thrillingly joyous thought. To be with him always. My starved emotional nature was crying for love and I succumbed utterly to the witchery of the night in the embraces of my beloved. He was going away on the morrow. He might never return. I clung to him with a fierceness which came from a source that I did not comprehend.

"Indiscretion:—Carelessness of consequences." How could I be so careless of consequences of which I knew nothing? Let those, who would thoughtlessly condemn, remember that. It applies not only to my case but to hundreds of others as well.

When the train departed at an early hour the next morning bearing my greatly beloved away to the terrible dangers of the trenches, I once more settled down to a dreary round

of existence. Yet it was not the same as before. I knew that I loved and was loved. Whatever happened, nothing could alter that. Deeply I regretted that there was no mother to whom I could confide the story of this wonderful love.

But dark days were to come. These I shall pass over hastily. A letter came from Victor shortly after his arrival at the front. It was a tender epistle, every line glowing with love. I am sure that no letter ever brought more joy. Dear, dear Victor! In all that has transpired since, I have never doubted the sincerity of that love.

And then, to my heart-agonizing despair, no other message came. Day after day sped by without bringing another line. You, who have with fear clutching at your hearts awaited the coming of the postman, only you can understand. I was afraid to read the casualty lists in the newspapers. Life was black, black!

And then one day another unexpected blow came. I received a brief message informing me that my father had died. Dimly I recall reading the telegram. Then there came a queer ringing sensation in my ears, followed for a time by oblivion.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in my own bed with its dainty lace canopy overhead. And my good friend, Dr. Bouchard, was bending over me. My returning senses brought back recollections of the telegram. I commenced to weep violently.

The good doctor made no effort to calm me for a time. There were tears in his eyes, too. My father had been one of his dearest and most valued friends, he told me.

"But you must not exhaust your strength by too much weeping, ma chèrie," he said at last. "Julie tells me that you have not been well for some time. We must try now to discover what the trouble is."

He then commenced to ask me questions, many of which

had little or no meaning to me. However I could not but notice that he was growing more and more distressed about something. Finally he rose from my bedside and stood for some time looking out of the window.

"This devilish war," I heard him mutter. "It exacts its fees from our daughters as well as our sons."

Then, with much delicacy and kindliness, he acquainted me with the astonishing fact that I was going to become a mother. I was stupefied, and until he had made considerable explanation, unable to grasp his meaning.

As he arose to go, he stooped and touched his lips to my forehead. "Courage, ma petite!" he said tenderly. "Be assured that you will never lack for a friend as long as old Dr. Bouchard lives."

And so it happened, several weeks later, that one evening I slipped quietly away from my native village and took the midnight train for Paris. Dr. Bouchard was away and Julie had been called home by the illness of her mother. Thus I bade farewell to no one and my departure was unobserved.

Although I was nearly eighteen years old, it was the first railway journey I had ever made unaccompanied and the prospect frightened me. I was garbed in deep mourning and the long, black veil which concealed my features gave some feeling of protection.

The compartment where I had been given a reservation had only two other occupants, both army officers. Since the war, of course, sleeping coaches had become a luxury of the past and, apparently it would be necessary for me to sit there all night in the company of these two strange men.

Timidly I sank down in one corner of the compartment. For weeks past I had been living in a constant state of terror and foreboding and my nerves were beginning to give evidences of the constant strain.

One of the officers was a Belgian, whom, I nervously

noted, had been drinking. The other, sleeping in the corner with his cap pulled down over his eyes, wore an American uniform.

Scarcely had the train started before the Belgian, much to my alarm, commenced to ogle me with what he must have supposed to be fond glances. Finally he boldly arose and moved over to sit down beside me.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle," he said thickly. "You should make my acquaintance. Confidentially I don't mind telling you that I am looking for a sweetheart."

I was too terrified to speak and tried to shrink away from him. He, however, moved closer and, before I had realized his intention, had thrown back my veil. At the same time he endeavored to slip his arm around my waist. Then my nerves gave way and I let out a piercing shriek.

At this sound the other officer sprang to his feet and stood blinking at us unsteadily. However, he seemed to grasp the situation at once and grabbed the astonished Belgian by the back of his collar and began raining blows upon him. He then threw him into the corridor where he scrambled to his feet and disappeared. He did not annoy me again.

My nerves had collapsed entirely and I was seized with a violent fit of weeping. The American officer made an awkward effort to comfort me, looking genuinely distressed.

Finally when my sobbing had quieted somewhat he commenced to talk, as one comrade might talk to another. Then I saw that he was quite handsome, after a rugged fashion, with a clean, honest, direct gaze that was appealing in its straight-forwardness.

I learned that he was an American observer with the English flying corps. He assured me that the United States would soon take an active part in the conflict. He had had many thrilling experiences, but was modestly reticent about his share in these escapades.

He got off the train at Blois, where he was to take another train for the front. Before he left me, however, he had shown me a picture of his sweetheart back in the United States, whom I secretly thought was a very lucky girl indeed. He was lonely, he said, and asked if he might call on me some time at my home. Of course I was obliged to give him an evasive answer.

When I arrived in Paris, I went immediately to the address which Dr. Bouchard had given me. It was a hospital. Here, several weeks later, my darling son was born. I named him Pierre in honor of my father.

When I left the hospital the question of how I was to live presented itself. My own funds were practically exhausted, for the modest savings of my father had been tied up in industries which the war had made worthless.

I had determined that I would never go back to my native village, unless I could go back with Victor. My only alternative, therefore, was to seek employment of some kind which would support myself and my baby.

I rented a room at a place where the housekeeper agreed to take care of little Pierre during the day. Then followed days of discouragement and despair. I, a simple, unsophisticated village girl with no real knowledge of the world and its ways, was thrown into the maelstrom of the Parisian boulevards in war time. It was a sickening awakening to a side of life which I had never even dreamed had existed.

Those were dark, dark days which swiftly and cruelly were leading up to the darkest day of all.

It was a day in which I had wandered far in my fruitless search for work. Late that afternoon I felt that I could walk no farther and wearily sank down beside the table of a sidewalk café. Seated near me were a number of the girls of the boulevards, who were well dressed, and were eating generously of good foods. They laughed and chatted gayly.

For a moment—a brief moment only—I rather bitterly contrasted my lot with theirs. Why not take whatever life had to offer, as they did? What was there before me, save starvation?

The snatches of their conversation reached my ears. I heard bits of vileness that made me shudder to think that members of my sex could sink so low. No, no, not that! Whatever happened, not that!

As the scornful waiter, who had taken my modest order of coffee and rolls, showed no signs of returning, I picked up an evening paper which some one had left lying on the table. Idly I commenced to glance through its columns. The front page as usual contained nothing but war news. There was a long list of killed and wounded and then——

One black line seemed to leap from the page and pierce my heart. It contained the information that Victor de la Boyer, long missing, had been reported among the deaths which had occurred in a German prison camp.

Victor dead! The world reeled about me. Victor dead! Yes, dead in a prison camp. That explained the long silence. That explained everything. Why I would never see him again. Our baby would never see its father.

An icy chill crept over me. I did not weep. I could not. Unsteadily I rose from the table and started to walk away. Some of the girls tittered. They thought I was intoxicated. But I paid no heed. I walked on and on.

Night came on and still I wandered. The feeble street lights of war-time Paris were turned on. Several men spoke to me. One even grasped me by the arm. I was frightened but pulled away without saying a word and continued my aimless wanderings.

At last I became aware that I was walking by the Seine, dark river of tragedy. I stopped and stood looking over the railing at the inky blackness of the water far below.

My head was throbbing terribly. At times it seemed as

though I could not bear the torture for a moment longer. Horrible thoughts came to my mind. Why not end it all? What had I left to live for? Why wait for starvation? The sombre depth of the Seine would bring me peace.

And then there floated before my eyes a vision of a tiny face with a wistful smile. Pierre! I had forgotten my dear little son. He still needed me. I had no right to ask him to face life alone. Shamefacedly I turned away from the river.

When I returned to my modest lodgings the concierge informed me that a gentleman was waiting to see me, and had been waiting for some time. Curiously I pushed open the door of the reception room, and then at the sight of the figure sitting there, I gave a cry of joy and sprang forward and threw my arms about his neck.

It was my good friend, Dr. Bouchard!

"Ouf, what is this?" he cried. "Oh, it is you at last, ma petite. You have been neglecting the old doctor, your second father, so he had to hunt you up."

The kindness of his tone touched me deeply. Sobbing, I sank to the floor at his feet and rested my head on his knees. And in the conversation which followed I told him everything—my struggles, my loneliness, and then of the crushing news of Victor's death. And to him—the first time I had breathed the secret to anyone—I confided the fact that Victor de la Boyer was the father of my child.

He nodded comprehendingly. "I had suspected as much," he said. "He was a splendid young man, Celeste. Your boy is of a blood which may yet accomplish much in the years to come. But before we continue this conversation you must have some food."

Jumping up, he ran to the door and ordered the concierge to prepare me a meal. Thereupon, for the first time, I noticed that he was dressed in a uniform bearing the insignia of the medical corps.

"I have charge of a military hospital near Baccarat," he explained. "We are not far from the fighting lines. Like every other hospital at the present time, we need helpers. Just now we are in especial need of an assistant who can speak English, for we have a number of English-speaking patients. So," he added with a smile, "I have come to take you back with me."

Thus it happened on the following day that I found some good people living near Paris, who promised to take good care of little Pierre for me. I then departed with Dr. Bouchard for Baccarat.

In the months which followed, I witnessed pain, suffering, heroism, and such heart-rending scenes as made my own troubles, great as they had seemed, sink into insignificance. It also brought to me realization of the eternal truth that service to others is the surest cure for our own worries.

As might be imagined, the work was hard and nerve-wracking. We ate and slept as we could and seldom had the opportunity to venture outside the stone walls which surrounded the hospital. Even now my memories of Baccarat are principally of shell-torn houses, perpetually dusty or muddy roads, and endless streams of army trucks rumbling along over the cobblestones of the village streets.

Gradually I assumed the duties of a full-fledged nurse. By the following spring the Americans had commenced to arrive in France in great numbers and we were cheered by reports of their splendid ability as soldiers.

One evening, as I went to go on duty in my ward, Dr. Bouchard told me that a patient of especial distinction had been received that day. He was an American aviator with a brilliant record. He had crashed after a terrific battle in which he had brought down two of the enemy planes. Although his injuries were of a serious nature, there was still a fighting chance for his life.

A few minutes later I curiously approached the bedside of this brave young man. As the flickering glare of the candle revealed his features, I gave a start of genuine surprise. It was the American who had saved me from the Belgian's insult on the night of my memorable trip to Paris.

Poor boy, I remembered him well. I also remembered the photograph of his sweetheart which he had shown and my heart went out to her. If this young man, whom no doubt she loved deeply, were to die, her life would be left as empty as mine had been. He must not die! Grimly I determined that.

Then followed a hard fight which we waged with death for the possession of that young man's body. It was a struggle which lasted for several days, but in the end, the medical skill of Dr. Bouchard and my almost ceaseless care and attention won. One day the fever receded, and he returned to the world of consciousness.

"Why, how did you get here?" was his surprised question as I came to his bedside. "I know you. You're the young lady I met on the train that night. But what are you doing here? And what am I doing here?" he queried faintly.

I explained what had happened and he soon dropped into a restful sleep. A day or two later I asked him if he wished to send some message to his sweetheart back in his home.

He smiled rather bitterly. "She is no longer my sweetheart," he said shortly. "She's married now—she married a fellow with a lot of money, and ability to dodge the draft."

"Oh, I am so sorry that I mentioned it," I cried in real distress. "Please forgive me."

"Sure, that's all right," was the reply. "I bear her no ill will. I hope she's happy. Guess I ought to feel happy to have escaped her. Let's talk about something else."

In the days and weeks which followed we became very well acquainted indeed. His convalescence was slow, for

his wounds had been of a very serious nature. Captain John Gordon—that was his name—was well on the road to recovery. But one night he received a setback in a most distressing manner.

One of the shell-shock patients in my ward suddenly became violently insane and made an effort to stab me with a rifle bayonet. Despite his own injuries and his weakened condition, Captain Gordon, whose cot was near by, sprang to my rescue and actually succeeded in overpowering and holding the maniac until help arrived.

His courageous action undoubtedly saved my life. In the struggle, however, some of his old wounds were opened and he was otherwise seriously injured. Again we battled with death for him, and again we won.

Slowly, slowly, he improved. By the latter part of August, I was able to wheel him in an invalid chair outside underneath the great elms of the hospital grounds. And then one day he asked me to become his wife.

"I love you, Celeste," he pleaded. "You are all to me that any woman could be to a man, and I want you near me always."

It was a question which I knew that I had been longing to hear, yet dreaded. The memory of Victor was still a revered one in my heart. He was my first love and no one else could ever quite take his place. Yet I was deeply attached to this lovable American with his broad and generous nature. But would he be capable of understanding my "indiscretion" of the past?

And so I drew close to him and with bowed head and faltering lips, and in a voice that was almost a whisper, I told him of the existence of little Pierre whose father had perished in the war—a father whose name he could not bear.

For a long time after I had finished there was a silence. When I finally dared to glance at John, I saw that his face

had turned ashen white. He was suffering. But when he spoke, his voice was steady.

"Dearest heart," he said softly, "I am too honest, I hope, to say that what you have told me does not give me a jolt. It does. Yet, who am I to judge you? I am sure of all you are to-day, and that is what counts. The past shall be forgotten. It is the future we must plan for."

"Then you still love me, John?" I asked tearfully.

His answer was quite satisfactory.

Details were discussed in the days which followed. John himself proposed that little Pierre should be reared as though he were *our* son, bearing the name of Gordon. He argued that the rest of the world need never know the difference, including Pierre himself.

Three days after the joyful news of the close of the war came, we were married. Dr. Bouchard was a witness. The good doctor had accepted a government mission in North Africa and he wept at parting with me as though I were indeed his own daughter.

Immediately after the ceremony we went to Paris where John had his first meeting with little Pierre. His heart was completely won to the boy from the first, and from that time on their relation became that of a devoted father and son.

I did not visit my native village before we sailed for the United States. There were too many sad memories there and I had severed all ties. I was resolved that in the new country to which my husband was taking me, I would indeed start life anew.

And my new life was not without its struggles. As "that French girl" whom John had brought from France, I had to conquer many prejudices, racial and otherwise, which existed in the minds of the people with whom we came in contact in John's home. We lived in a thriving small city of the Middle West.

Soon I discovered that it was I who must do the planning for our little household. John's injuries did not improve after our return to his home. In fact, they grew steadily worse and it was soon evident that he was destined to be a confirmed invalid.

This is the reason that for several years past, a small sign in gold letters reading "Madame Celeste—French Gowns" might have been found on a small shop just across the street from the cottage which John, Pierre and myself call "home."

Eh, bien, it has been a busy life. John, poor fellow, faded away to a mere shadow of what was once a gallant and active man—a man vibrant with life. Caring for him demanded my almost constant attention when I was not working in the shop.

But little Pierre has been all that any fond mother could wish. Although he is now not quite ten years old, he has already shown signs of that artistic talent which once burned in the soul of his father and of my father. And I have long been saving and planning for the education which will enable him to give that talent expression.

And so my life was very busy. I tried not to repine and to accept cheerfully what fate had in store for me. But sometimes thoughts of the quaint little village where I was born bring a blur to my eyes. And it is not strange that visions of a lovely old château on the hill, of Victor's face with his eyes filled with love light, and of my father's erect figure of which I once was so proud, sometimes cause tears to drop on my sewing. Is not my hatred of war well founded?

Then, as if I had not suffered enough, six years after the war had ended, I experienced the most crushing blow of all.

It came on a morning following a night which had been made particularly trying by John having one of his bad

spells. After he had finally become quiet, I hurried over to the shop where I had an order for which the customer was in a hurry. I was busily engaged in sewing away when I heard the door of the shop open and close. Thinking it was my customer I leisurely made my way from behind the screen which concealed my sewing machine. Then I gave a piercing scream and almost fainted dead away.

It was Victor de la Boyer—alive!

The room commenced to whirl around and there was a queer sound as though someone was holding a tuning fork to my ears. Resolutely I tried to disbelieve the evidence of my senses and attribute what I saw to overwrought nerves.

As I looked again, I saw that the pallor of his own face had become more intense. Yet his glowing eyes looked tremendously alive. He put one hand out to grasp the back of a chair for support as he said, "Celeste! *Mon Dieu!* Truly it is Celeste!"

The familiar sound of his voice made me realize that this was no ghost. In some miraculous manner it was Victor, an older Victor than I had known, with many marks of physical and mental suffering on his features.

At last I found my voice. "Victor!" I shrieked. "It is Victor! Oh, how could I have ever believed you dead when you have always been so alive in my heart?"

The next few minutes which followed are, and always will be, hazy and indistinct in my memory. There were explanations, of course. Victor's "return from the dead" was easily explained. He had been severely wounded in the first engagement in which he had taken part and had been taken prisoner by the enemy. Then for months he had lingered between life and death in a prison hospital. Finally, through a stupid clerical error in which regimental numbers were shifted, his name was sent out among the deaths. He was not aware of this until some time after the armistice was signed, when he was sent home.

"Then I found that everyone had believed me dead," he said sadly. "My grandfather was dead and almost everyone in the village that I knew was dead or gone. No one knew what had become of you. It was rumored that you had been killed while working in one of the field hospitals. I was frantic with grief. No one can realize how I suffered."

He stopped for a moment to control himself. We both were weeping now. Finally he continued, "With you gone I wanted to get away from the village. I accepted a government post in Morocco where I have been ever since. Three weeks ago I received a letter from old Dr. Bouchard who had just learned that I was alive. He felt that I should know that you are still living and that I am the father of your son. He explained that his only object in telling me of those facts was because he knows that I am a wealthy man and should make some provision for the future of the boy—my son. My son, Celeste! I never dreamed of such a thing. My darling, what you have suffered because of my blind folly. You must have hated my memory, even when you believed me dead."

"No, Victor," I said gently, "I have never hated you—I could never hate you. Ours was a great and sincere love. For our mistakes we have both paid heavily. There is no need for you to condemn yourself."

"I took the first boat that sailed after I received the doctor's letter," he said eagerly. "I must atone in some way. The boy—is he well?"

"Quite well and a boy that you may well be proud of, Victor," I replied. "He is going to be a real artist some day, if the *bon Dieu* permits."

"An artist," he repeated joyfully, then he glanced quickly down at his own right hand. So dazed had I been at the meeting that for the first time I noticed that his right arm was an artificial one. I gave a little cry of horror.

"Yes," he replied to my unspoken question. "Another tribute which was demanded—my good right arm. With it perished my dream of becoming a sculptor." There was a trace of bitterness in his tones but it disappeared quickly. "I did not mean to complain. I am better off than thousands of others."

Poor Victor! No one knew better than I how terribly hard it must have been for him to thus relinquish the ambition which had so gripped him from early boyhood. Impulsively I reached over and gripped his remaining hand with both my own in a pressure of understanding and sympathy.

Suddenly he gave way and sank to his knees at my feet. I found myself smoothing his hair and comforting him as a mother would comfort a child.

"Oh, Celeste, my dearest one," he cried. "I need you so. No one has ever taken your place in my life. No one else ever can. You must come back to France with me. I need you! I need you! You know that I love you, have always loved you, and must always continue to love you."

"But Victor, dear, you forget that I am not free. I am the wife of another. I cannot ignore my duty to him."

"He must give you up," he exclaimed passionately. "You are mine by every true law of justice. A cruel war separated us, but merciful Providence has brought us together again. No one else can love you as I do, no one else can need you as I do. I will attend to the legal proceedings which are necessary and you and my son shall go back to France with me. We shall live in the old château, Celeste. You must come with me. These people are not your people and this land is not your land."

A picture came to mind of a beautiful old vine-covered château on a green hill in my native land. *La belle France!* Try as hard as I may nothing can ever erase the love, the deep love of that fair land from my heart.

Victor continued his pleading. "I am rich now, Celeste, and you shall share all I have with me and forget that you were ever a dressmaker. You, who were created to be adorned by beautiful gowns, not to make them! My son shall be reared as befits a de la Boyer. You shall be the Comtesse de la Boyer and——"

"Please stop, Victor," I interrupted gently. "I must have a few minutes to think this over quietly. You are exhausted, dear. Sit down and let us both try to control our emotions."

Without a word he sank into a chair and I walked over to a window to think. Something afforded by the view there caught my attention and held it. I gazed at it for some time before I finally turned to Victor, my decision made.

"Victor, dear, I am in a position that I would never have thought it possible for an honest woman to be placed in. I find that I love two men sincerely. You were my first love and I gave you my deepest devotion. It is useless for me to deny, now that you are back in this startling way, that I find that much of the old love still remains. But there is another, Victor, to whom I rightfully owe a full measure of love and devotion."

He raised his head. His face was drawn and haggard. "You love this other man then?" he asked.

"Yes, Victor," I answered thoughtfully. "I love and respect him and there is good reason why I should. But, Heaven help me, dear, I love you, too, and would do any honorable thing within my power to increase your happiness."

He sprang to his feet and stood gazing at me. In his eyes was the look which a judge must see in the eyes of those who await a sentence of life or death.

I continued bravely. "The last few crowded years of my life have taught me many valuable lessons, Victor. One

of them has been that true happiness cannot be found if we disregard our responsibilities. Come over here, dear."

I took him to the window which afforded a view of the cottage which was my home. Wrapped about with blankets, the wasted and worn figure of John was seated in an easy chair on the veranda. Seated at his feet was Pierre, who was listening with absorbed interest to something that John was telling him.

"That man is my husband, Victor," I said quietly. "He was a brave soldier with a brilliant record. The war has left him as you see him now. Doctors tell me that he may live only for a few months or he may live for many years. His most serious injuries were received in defending me from the attack of a maniac in the hospital. So you see, dear, as long as life lasts I must remain at his side."

Victor was staring steadily at the two figures. There were tears in his eyes. Suddenly he gripped my arm with a fierce intensity. "The boy!" he demanded. "Is that boy my son?"

"That boy is Pierre, your son, Victor," I replied softly.

He wheeled about eagerly. "May I talk to the boy, Celeste," he faltered. "May I take my boy in my arms?"

My heart bled within me as I was forced to reply. "It is your right to do so if you wish, Victor. But first I must tell you that I married John when Pierre was still a baby. Under the circumstances we felt it best to let the boy think that John is his father. He has always believed this. He idolizes John, whom he firmly believes is the bravest man in the world. Pierre is a sensitive little soul, Victor, and—and——"

Victor stopped me. "I understand, Celeste," he said. There was a painful quietness for a few moments. Victor was lost in thought. When he turned and spoke his tones were husky but decisive.

"You are right, Celeste," he said. "Your duty clearly lies

here. I can have no part in your life as you must live it now. But my boy's future I must and shall provide for. Do not fear, no one need know the true source from which it comes. Keep me informed of his progress."

He turned and looked across the way again—a long and lingering look. Then he turned quickly away and extended his hand to me.

"*Au revoir,* Celeste, my eternal love," he said so sadly that each note of his voice pierced my already quivering heart. "It is better that I should leave at once. My son thinks that the man whom he has always called father is the bravest man in the world. His real father must prove that he also is not lacking in courage."

I was overwhelmed with many emotions and could not trust myself to speak, but my eyes must have revealed all that lay deep within my heart which my lips could not find words for. Victor stood looking at me for a few moments with an intentness which made me feel that he was photographing my image in the innermost recesses of his soul. When at last he spoke, his words came slowly and musingly, as though he were thinking aloud.

"I do not question that your husband has been one of the bravest of men, and some might say that my war record is proof that I, too, am not lacking in that quality. But the brand of courage which you possess, Celeste, *ma brave,* is of more worth to the world than that which is found on battle-fields.

"*Au revoir,* goddess of my heart. Be the time short or long, you will find me ever waiting. *Allons!*"

After a time, when I was able to mechanically return to work at my sewing machine, there stole over my consciousness that feeling of comfort which surely comes to the heart of every soldier who feels that he has fought a good fight and won!

Nearly two years have passed since that visit of Victor's.

John marched into the Final Encampment more than a year ago. Shortly before the end, he called me to his bedside. For days he had been delirious, but his brain had suddenly become quite clear. He smiled at me faintly.

"Celeste, dearest one, I guess it's taps for me soon, very soon. Don't grieve, comrade of mine, for I can see very plainly that it is better that the finish should come now. I am carrying with me into the next world a wonderful memory of your unfailing love and devotion. All that a good woman could be to a man you have been to me. God bless you always."

Thus passed a heroic soul. My period of mourning is now ended and in a few days I shall sail for France to become mistress of the old château on the hill. A wonderful vista of happiness lies before me. But always I shall carry with me a sweet and tender memory of my American husband, a memory not marred with the regrets which surely would have come had I neglected my duty.

And I am glad, very glad, that I waited.

II

My Mad Elopement

O-NIGHT as I sit by the open fire and gaze into the dying embers, my mind drifts back over the past, my years seem to have dropped away as a garment, my hair is no longer streaked with gray, my step is as light and elastic as in bygone days.

A sweet sound comes to my ears, the prattle of little children; their fairy forms flit past me in the firelight, and I reach out my arms, but always they are empty. Then comes vivid recollection—my pleasant dream is over. But because God has given me these moments, I am content to live.

Few know the real facts of my life story, and from those who do know, there is only censure and blame, but perhaps some kind reader may read between the lines and forget to blame, or some erring foot may be stayed by the story I have to tell. If so, it will not be told in vain.

Romance came into my life at seventeen. At twenty, perhaps it might have been different, but seventeen is ever heedless, and thinks not of to-morrow, but blissfully spends each golden moment of to-day.

It was at a gay little party that I met Horace Grant. He was somehow different from the usual sort of men I had met. He was tall and dark, his voice was soft and caressing, and his eyes looked into mine with an assurance all their own. I was infatuated. Then I thought it was love; now I know it was only the infatuation of seventeen. Love came later.

The final, crashing bars of a waltz came to a close, and

Horace was by my side. The room was lighted with shaded, golden lights. Outside, a big yellow moon smiled down in approval. The lilacs were in bloom, and their sweet fragrance came to us as we stood side by side in an open doorway. In a moment we were outside in the lilac-scented garden and before I knew it, I was in his arms and he was whispering eager protestations of love in his caressing voice which, to me, was sweet music.

Early in September we were married. We settled down to the routine of everyday life and, although Horace's salary was not large, we were comfortable. In two years Horace, Jr., was born, and a year later came Marjorie.

Life moved very smoothly for about four years. Then Horace had business worries, and he would come home with a frown on his brow which I tried to erase by a loving kiss. He always seemed too tired or too busy to take me any place, so I began to seek my own happiness.

The gay, reckless crowd I kept company with made me forget my troubles. Then I met Forest Harvey. We were attracted to each other at first sight. He was handsome and paid me marked attention. All I wanted was to be near him, to touch his shoulder, to feel his hand in mine. I was in love, I, a married woman with two children, was in love with another man who was not my husband.

At first the enormity of the idea made me dizzy, but the man fascinated me, and life with Horace had been so conventional, so commonplace, that I snatched at even a moment's excitement.

I met Forest Harvey many times after that. One evening after telling Horace I was spending the evening at the home of a girl friend, I went to Forest who received me with open arms. With his mouth close to my ear, he told me of his love, covering my lips with kisses. I clung to him, caring not what happened as long as I was in his arms. Eagerly he urged me to run away with him. For

a moment, thoughts of Horace and the babies came to me and I would not yield, but Forest's entreaties were so passionate that I promised tearfully.

"Sweetheart," he murmured, "meet me to-morrow night at my rooms." With my head on his shoulder, I promised.

Returning to my home, I looked in at my husband. He was peacefully sleeping. Poor, dear, unsuspecting Horace, who believed his wife faithful!

"But I love Forest," I murmured to still the voice of my conscience, "and love is ever paramount." With blinding tears in my eyes I stumbled from the room.

The next day dragged wearily away, but evening came at last. Somehow, I was not looking forward to my adventure as I had expected to.

At twelve o'clock, I slipped noiselessly into the nursery. The moon had risen and was silvering the room with its glory, caressing lovingly the forms of my darling babies. Don't think, dear readers, that I didn't love them. I did, but Forest's laughing, teasing face came before me making my babies' faces only a blurred vision.

Silently I stood looking down on them. A salt tear splashed down on little Horace's upturned face and sleepily he murmured, "Mother"—just the one word, but it was the key to my heart and I gathered him into my arms. For an hour I held him thus, then quietly disengaging his clinging arms from about my neck, I stooped and kissed my little daughter.

Blindly I staggered from the room, and groped my way downstairs.

Not giving myself time to think, I went to Forest's rooms where he was waiting for me.

I trembled as he drew me to him.

"Are you afraid, little one?" he asked, with his face close to mine. "Let us drink deep of this ecstasy while we have it and be content."

We left that night for a far distant city. Even yet, that night's ride is vivid in my memory.

At the end of three days, we came to our destination. Forest was as loving as ever; yet beneath it all, I sensed an unrest. I was tired and worn, and my thoughts flew back to Horace and the babies. I cried out sharply.

"Are you sick of our bargain?" Forest asked.

"No," I lied. "I am only tired."

Horace, I supposed, would get a divorce; perhaps he would marry again. Somehow, this thought did not please me. Horace was mine. He must not belong to another.

I watched the papers eagerly, yet dreading what I might see. Glaring headlines met my gaze:

Strange Disappearance of Mrs. Horace Grant
Believed to Have Committed Suicide
Motor Coat She Was Wearing on Day of Disappearance
Found Near High Level Bridge

There was more but I couldn't see; the paper swam before me, and I sank down in a limp heap where Forest found me later.

When I regained consciousness, Forest was standing over me, almost roughly he shook me as he said, "You little fool, don't get weak-kneed now."

Tearfully I clung to him. "Oh, Forest," I moaned, "don't be cruel. Tell me, did you put my coat on the bridge to make them think that—that—" I couldn't finish the sentence.

"Of course," he answered indifferently. "I wasn't going to have the police on our trail."

Even then I admired Forest, admired him for the dare-devil light in his eyes; the easy nonchalance of his voice. Still I was troubled. His love seemed forced, and then, unconsciously perhaps, I was comparing him with Horace, and Forest suffered by the comparison.

Months passed. Forest never seemed to be at home now, or if he was, he was moody and irritable, or often he would come reeling home under the influence of drink, bringing with him strange companions who in their drunken state would hint darkly of strange women.

Then one night Forest failed to come at all. All night long I lay in an agony of suspense, waiting for the stumbling footsteps I had so learned to dread. Morning came at last. At the first gray streaks of dawn, I stole from my bed. All of Forest's belongings were gone.

For a moment I was stunned, dazed, by what had happened. I could not reason or think. My mind seemed a blank. But through it all, the eyes of Horace seemed to be looking into mine. They were not accusing, but filled with the love-light of old, as on that lilac scented June night when first we met.

I tried to shut my eyes to exclude the vision, but ever those eyes danced before me, until I screamed and sank to the floor unconscious.

When I came to myself, some weeks later, I was lying in a hospital ward and a kind-faced sister with lustrous dark eyes was gazing at me pityingly.

Then I was alive, after all! Somehow, for the past week, I had had a vague notion that I was dead, and it didn't seem to matter. Life wasn't worth living. Horace's love for me was dead. Horace! Why must I ever think of Horace? I had forfeited all right to his affection, trampled his clean honest love under my feet; had left him for a worthless scoundrel who couldn't even offer me a name.

The silence of the hospital seemed to soothe my harrowed soul. Often I would kneel at the altar steps with the sisters, as they told their beads. I prayed that God might have pity on those beloved ones who were suffering because of me.

By the time I was well again, I had decided to make

nursing my life work. Somehow, I felt that, in ministering to the needs of others, I would gain absolution from my sins, but I knew that only Time would heal my broken heart. Now I know that not even eternity itself is long enough, and but for my beautiful dream and the ethereal forms of my children, as they come to me at the evening hour, memory would be a hateful thing.

Nature seldom lets us die when we want to, so I took up the burden of life and, although my heart seemed to have frozen to stone I forced my lips to smile.

I spent three years at the hospital; then came a flu epidemic. Hospitals in every part of the land sent out all the nurses that could be spared, and I found myself one dark April morning, bound for a distant city in response to a call for help.

Arriving at my destination, I sought out the local Health Board and was given an address of a private home, whither I went at once.

The house had a desolate look as if it had been deserted. I walked up the steps and rang the bell. A gray-haired woman answered my summons. I soon discovered that she was the housekeeper.

"Oh, nurse!" she fairly sobbed, "we are in a bad way here. The two children are very low, and the master just raves day and night."

I tried to comfort her as best I could as she led the way to the room where the master of the house lay. She stood just inside the door watching me as if to read a verdict of life or death upon my face.

Something familiar about the attitude of the man made my heart beat very quickly and unprofessionally.

I went to the bed and gazed in amazement down on the form of the sick man who lay there muttering incoherently.

It was Horace!

For a moment the room seemed to reel while the house-

keeper gazed disapprovingly from the doorway. One thought was uppermost in my mind. He was mine. Nothing could take him from me. No, not even death! And then came bitter recollection. He was not mine! I had cast him away as a child casts away a worn-out toy. I had wrecked his life and mine, too. I had renounced his love. I understood fully then that those who break the law are broken by it, and I sank on my knees and buried my face in the pillow beside Horace's dark head, now silvering at the temples, unmindful of the terrible disease that was racking his body.

Then my professional training began to assert itself, and I lifted my head, wiped away my tears, and set about making him more comfortable. Then I stole to the room where the children lay—Horace's children and mine.

Young Horace was much like his father. His hair lay dark and damp on his high, intellectual forehead. His eyes when closed were fringed with long lashes. One thin little hand stole listlessly outside of the covers. With my heart near to bursting, I took his burning hand in mine. His pulse was very weak. He had developed double pneumonia.

Oh! Was I to lose him in the hour of finding?

Sadly, with my eyes full of blinding tears, I went and looked down at my little daughter. She resembled her mother. Yes, I suppose I was still her mother. Nature had made me that. Her hair, which had been cut short, clung to her head in clustering, golden ringlets. Her eyes were gray, and fringed with dark lashes.

"Oh, Lord," I prayed, "spare at least one of my darlings."

But I knew it was not to be. I had been led here only to be reminded of my mortal sin.

My thoughts were disjointed. I think, for a time, I was mad, but sanity came at last, and I sat by the bedside of my darlings, moving from one to the other at the slightest sound.

Marjorie was the first to go. With scarcely a sigh she slipped away to the land where pain is not known.

With my grief almost more than I could bear, I closed her eyes and sat down by little Horace. His breathing was becoming labored.

I couldn't pray. In dumb misery I sat there, and my past sins came up before me. Truly the way of the transgressor is hard, and it was doubly hard for me as I sat with the wasted hand of my little son in mine.

Sometimes things are revealed to those who are about to enter the valley of shadow. I know not why, for God's ways are past understanding, but little Horace opened his dark eyes and looked full at me, while a smile of unearthly beauty lighted up his face. Then his hand stole into mine and he whispered faintly, "Mother." It was the last word I had heard him speak the night I had left my home, and it was the last word his tired lips would frame, for his head sank back and he was beyond recall.

The children were buried in the churchyard near by. Alone with my grief, I went and sat by Horace. He was resting more easily, but he was muttering in his delirium. I bent close to hear the words.

"Margaret," he murmured, and his lips smiled. "Love is a priceless thing, because it brought me you." His voice trailed off into silence.

Involuntarily I started. It seemed he must know of my presence, but his breathing was heavy, and I knew he was still unconscious.

With my arms around him, I dropped to my knees. "Oh! Horace," I moaned, "I have come back to you," and the sorrow of my broken heart begged for liberation in confessional sobs.

The feeling of my arms about him seemed to quiet him, and he dropped off into a deep sleep.

Flight was the next thought. I must get away. But my

limbs refused to obey my will and I continued to kneel by Horace.

How long I remained on my knees, I do not know. I think I lost consciousness. When I came to myself, Horace was awake. For a moment he gazed at my face as if uncertain of himself. Then weakly he reached out a thin, transparent hand and clutched mine, drawing me lovingly toward him.

"Margaret?" His voice was filled with wonder. "Is it really you? I dreamed I was in heaven and you came to me —came as an angel of mercy."

"No, Horace, I have been in torment, but this is heaven," I said as I snuggled into his arms.

The strange story of my disappearance had been believed, and Horace, nearly heartbroken, had taken the children and moved to the place where he was now living. Horace had believed me faithful. He didn't ask for any explanation now. He was content to have me near him and with my sin and shame searing my heart, I could only wait until he was stronger.

Horace improved daily. One evening, just at twilight, I was beside him as usual when, with his face close to mine, he asked me a question which I knew must be answered. The mystery of the past years must be unraveled. My own lips must pass the sentence. The sound of my own voice must be the death knell of all my hopes, for, of course, I could never stay after my horrible story was revealed. Horace would despise me, for the evil I had done. My head sank upon my breast and I cried aloud.

Then strength came to me and with my eyes averted I told the story of my sin and shame. No other sound was audible in the room except the rise and fall of my own voice. Horace seemed scarcely to breathe at times.

"Now I know," I finished lamely, "that you will hate me, but you cannot hate me worse than I hate myself." I paused.

I had grown suddenly tired. Horace seemed scarcely to hear me.

I gazed out of the window. The twilight had deepened and a large, silvery moon was keeping watch over the world. The stars came out, one by one, and looked down upon us. I sat in silence with my soul bared, waiting for condemnation from the lips of the man I loved.

His words came at last, not like a torrent, as I had expected, but in the same caressing voice as of old:

"Margaret, love is stronger than hate, and when a man really loves, he wants to give only happiness. You have gone through a scorching fire and your wings have been singed, but your soul has soared, and remains pure. And love is of the soul."

The stars came out unheeded, the curtain of night was drawn close, the flaming banners of purple and gold had faded from the sky and we were alone with our love.

Six years have passed since our reunion; years filled with love and happiness, but my happiness is tinged with sorrow, for my arms are empty and my heart is hungry.

Often I visit the churchyard where the grass has grown thick and green on two little mounds, and there I kneel and ask forgiveness. And I know that I have been forgiven, for God has given me the priceless treasure of a pure, true love.

III

Is It Too Late?

MY STORY has laid in my heart for many years. I have been too proud to give it to unheeding ears—too bitter to give it to those whom it concerns most deeply.

The man who loved me has long been gone, and I pray that in the Beyond he knows the bitterness of my repentance. But members of his family are still living, and it is in the hope that one of these may see it, and that I may in this way do a little to right the wrong I did him, and them, that I am moved to tell it now.

I was just eighteen when Gilbert Thorpe first saw me. I was round of figure and red of lip, with eyes that glowed deep beneath strangely heavy lids. In the bottom of an old trunk is a photograph of me as I was then. I came across it the other day. It was years since I had seen it, and I looked at it as I would have looked at the face of a stranger. When I saw those eyelids, half drawn over the glinting fires beneath that still burned strangely up from the discolored pasteboard, I said to myself that Gilbert Thorpe should have known enough to beware of a woman with eyes like that. Oh, I know now right well what I was, and what my attraction was for a man. Then I only knew I had a power that it thrilled me to use. And I used it without conscience or restraint. I wanted to live—to live! I wanted to satisfy an eager something in me that looked beyond the drab surroundings of my prairie home to some glorious existence of which I had no knowledge, but of which I could dream. And I did dream—in the starry, warm nights when the prairie wind softened to a whisper and the short-curled

buffalo grass gave out a nameless tang that vaguely stirred my blood.

Whether my parents knew of my dreams I cannot even guess now. Time has washed away all but the vivid pulsations that throbbed in my own breast and those, alone, were strong enough to persist above the relentless tide of the years. But my mother, I knew, took intimate stock of my rounded grace. Her hands were rough and red from a life of toil, and her eyes, grown hard with looking at hard things, brightened only when they caught the glint of money, and when they rested now and then upon my hair; for it had the burnish of the prairie suns upon it and shone bright gold in the light. My father, I believe, was aware of my charms in his dull way. His hands were rougher than those of the woman who toiled beside him. And his eyes still more hard. But I caught them resting upon me in a peculiar way sometimes when he thought I didn't see. I know now that he saw in me that which roused a vague hope. Work —work—work from dawn until dark, from dawn until dark, day after day, year after year, through the scorching suns of the prairie summer, through the blasting fierce sweep of the blizzards of winter—that was his life. And it had made him a thing stolid and unfeeling, like the plowshare he drove. Small wonder that even a faint hope of a pause in this ceaseless drudgery brought now and then a feeling of gladness to his life.

I was born in a dugout. That was the common residence of the prairie pioneers of those days. My parents had come from the Middle West to the bare prairies of Western Kansas when that country was the outpost of civilization; when herds of buffalo were still to be seen, and an "Indian scare" now and then startled the settlers. The dugout was devised by necessity in a land where trees were not, and where a substantial protection must be found from piercing cold and scorching heat and the occasional cyclone.

Just how the vivid little being that was I, found its way into those drab surroundings is a puzzle to me now; knowing the world as I know it. For as I grew up, the rose color came into my soft cheeks, and entrancing fires to my dark eyes.

"The Rose of Paradise" someone named me. Paradise was the name of the town near which my father's little homestead lay. Strange name for that handful of unpainted wooden houses huddling around the water tank and the telegraph station. I have often wondered whether it was bestowed in sarcasm, or in the sublime faith that the place might grow into realization of it. But paradise it was to me, for the window of the little wooden store displayed cheap laces and ribbons, and an occasional piece of silk, that filled my small heart with longing dreams.

Already the "Iron Horse," chugging across the untamed prairies, was bringing in its wake those adjuncts of modern life which swiftly revolutionized the western country. The school and the meetinghouse took to themselves the central place in the metropolis of Paradise which the watering tank had erstwhile held. And a hotel with a stone front erected a proud head on Main Street. On Saturdays when my father drove into town for the week's supplies he always hitched at the iron bar in front of the hotel.

Oh, what those Saturdays meant to me! The bright central spot of life, around which all the dull days between gathered; meaningless except for the hope of it. The dilapidated old light wagon we drove—the only vehicle my father possessed—swiftly became the center of attraction for every male in the place on those wondrous days. It was then that the name, "Rose of Paradise," was given to me.

It was then that I began to feel that surge of nameless power within that intoxicated me and shaped my destiny to strange ends. And it was then that Gilbert Thorpe saw me.

For weeks the little town and the sparse ranches in the

country about had been agog over his expected arrival—the rich man from the East who had bought up a dozen sheep ranches and was starting in the sheep business on a magnificent scale.

He had had a substantial stone dwelling erected, and the like of the other preparations for his coming had never been seen in the paradise country before. Well I remember the excitement which the arrival of his carload of furniture caused. A grand piano—chairs upholstered in red plush, and—wonder of wonders!—a bathtub.

Finally he came. The news of it spread quickly to the ranches, and I saw to it that father was obliged to drive into Paradise. He drew up at the iron bar in front of the Paradise House as usual. My spirits rose in pleasant anticipation.

It so happened that Mr. Thorpe was just coming out of the hotel. I had never seen a man like him before. My eyes flew at once to the heavy gold watch chain draped across the front of his vest in the fashion of those days, and then to the large collar of his overcoat. I caught my breath. This was the sort of being I had read about in those paper-covered books that I managed somehow to procure and which, kept hidden between the covers of my bed lest my mother's eye light upon them, I devoured in secret. Mr. Foster, the banker and the most important man in the county, was with him, looking vastly awed by the honor which sat upon his shoulders.

As Mr. Thorpe came down the hotel steps in earnest conversation with Mr. Foster, he tossed away a half-smoked cigar. The end of it was glowing—an ember that was to light the torch of destiny for him and for me. For a gust of the eternal prairie wind caught it and dashed it into the face of old Bess, the bony nag which drew our wagon. She snorted and dropped to her haunches. One of the shafts snapped off short, and the front wheel cramped sharply

under the wagon bed. The three of us—my father, my mother, and myself—would have been thrown out but that Mr. Thorpe saw, and with one spring cleared the iron hitching rail, caught the wagon seat, and held the vehicle firm while Mr. Foster and a couple of bystanders dragged Bess to her feet.

Mr. Thorpe's apologies were profuse, and spoken in a language as different from the slipshod speech of the plains as if it had been a different tongue. The crisis made introductions superfluous. But Mr. Foster, mindful of his duties as chief citizen, finally, managed to pronounce them pompously.

I doubt if Gilbert Thorpe heard him. I had begun to laugh girlishly at the ridiculousness of old Bess, who, with her years and her bones, had insisted upon this display of temperament. He caught the laugh; his eyes flashed at once to me. Those were the days when we wore tight "fitted" waists and bustles. It was in the spring of the year, and I was without a wrap. I saw his glance rest upon the red curve of my laughing lips and then upon my figure. The rose color deepened swiftly in my cheeks and my heart gave a quickened beat as I read the admiration in his eyes. This rich man from out a different world—the world of wealth and fashion I had dreamed about—was looking at me in a way I already understood. That thrill of power I had felt before rose and surged bewilderingly through my veins. I knew that Fate had set its finger upon that day in my life.

Of what happened immediately after that, as we stood there with the wonderful stranger and Mr. Foster bowing before us, I have but a confused recollection. I knew in a vague way that a crowd had quickly gathered on the sidewalk near; that the proprietor of the Paradise House and all his help had come rushing out; that the near accident was already being discussed excitedly over half the town. Mr. Thorpe examined the damage done to our ancient vehicle

and assured father that he must buy him a new one, for the accident was entirely his fault. But I was lost in the dreams that flooded in upon me. Only one thing I knew certainly, and that was to let my heavy lids cover the slumbering fires of my eyes until the stranger was piqued into making me lift them. Only one thing I had clearly, his statement that he was to be a neighbor of ours and hoped to see us often.

My intuitions in that first moment came to swift fulfillment in the days that followed. Under Mr. Thorpe's supervision the wonderful furniture was duly installed in the big stone house, and he came there to live. It was only a few miles from our little ranch, and he made constant excuses to drive over. He pressed invitations upon us; overwhelmed my parents with gifts, and, presently, myself. It was somewhat of a surprise to him, I know now, to discover that he could bring me whatever gifts he chose and meet no scruple in their acceptance. And soon I was being showered with everything that the shops of Paradise could offer.

I now became the center of existence for my parents. I was to them a kind of golden egg which had hatched out in some marvelous manner in their homely nest. I was pampered and coddled. The washing of the dishes—a thing I had always hated—was no longer my task. My hands must be kept white and soft for Mr. Thorpe to admire. For the same reason my share in the other drudgery of the household fell away from me. Father strained his scant credit at the little shops in Paradise to buy me finery.

Ah, what days those were for me! I exulted—exulted with all that strange power in me which grew with the growing hours and which soon became the dominant sense in my being. I did not stop to question whether or not I loved the man who had wrought all this miracle. Even after I learned his tragic secret, I did not pause in my reach toward that which lured me.

At first glance, there was nothing out of the ordinary in

the appearance of Gilbert Thorpe. He was tall and carried himself with a certain distinction. The second glance, however, revealed that he usually wore a wide-brimmed hat that was always pulled well down over his head. It was not until his hat was off that his disfigurement was revealed; one ear had been torn off, leaving an unsightly hole in the side of his head and a great crimson scar that extended down on his cheek.

If I had known the world then as I know it now, I would have guessed at once that there was some reason for a man of wealth and culture leaving the surroundings to which he was accustomed, to make his dwelling upon the untamed plains of the West. As soon as I discovered his secret I knew that reason; knew that it was the hurt withdrawal of a sensitive temperament from the gaze of curious or pitying eyes, and that the western plains were to him what the inmost recesses of the forest are to the wounded animal—a place to hide its hurt from its kind.

On that dynamic day of our first meeting in front of the hotel, his wide hat pulled far down had concealed the disfigurement. So it was not until the occasion of his first visit to our house that I made the discovery. I gave a little gasp of horror when I saw, for I was young, and untrained to concealment. He flushed deeply, and I suddenly had the feeling of one who has unwittingly thrust hot iron into a raw wound. Red and stammering, I blurted out some sort of an apology. I could feel the quiver of will with which he braced himself to meet the situation. And then he explained to me in a quiet voice that when he was traveling in the Tyrol his horse had taken fright and dashed him against a tree; the jagged point of a broken limb caught his ear and tore it. He got to the nearest village as quickly as possible, but there was no doctor there. The only thing obtainable in the way of medical aid was a little apothecary shop with a scant store of drugs. Exactly how it happened he was

never able to learn, but it seems the old apothecary must have applied the wrong drug in ignorance, for by the time he reached a town where a physician was to be had, the wound was in a terrible state, and he was almost insane. Everything was done then that skill could do, but the remnants of the ear had to be removed, and he almost lost his life from the effects of the poisoned wound.

I was deeply moved by the story, in spite of my gay thoughtlessness. For I saw that the physical wound was nothing to the agony which the consciousness of disfigurement inflicted upon him. He had been very handsome before that, as I saw from the photograph he later showed me. But the long illness and the suffering had emaciated his body and hollowed his cheeks, and he was never again the same man, either in mind or body.

But after the first sense of my pity for him passed away, I was strangely conscious of a feeling of relief. I had felt at once that he was my superior in birth, in breeding, in position, in culture—in everything. And there was something in me that hated that feeling. Here was one thing in which I was the superior; my beautiful young body, without blemish or scar, gave me that which all his money and all his culture could not give him.

But both the pity and the relief were soon swept away by the whirl of delights in which I was encompassed. Money, money, money poured out for me; the sight and the touch of the things I had always wanted. The pair of thoroughbred horses he drove had never had their like before in that raw country; nor had his surrey; a marvelous affair resplendent with new paint and a fringed canopy top. He came to drive me into town two or three times a week. Ah, the flurry of excitement we caused in Paradise as the thoroughbreds pranced through the streets! As we drew up in front of the Paradise House, an obsequious clerk—nay, the proprietor himself—rushed out to tie the horses,

and a crowd quickly gathered around to admire them! And how the blood sang in my veins, and the color danced on my cheeks with the pride of it all! And then Mr. Thorpe would buy me everything obtainable in the place in the way of luxuries or amusements, candy, fruit, perfume, laces, anything and everything that I would accept. (I blush now to think how little there was that I would not take!)

My parents, too, were given everything that his boundless generosity could devise. The dugout where I was born had by this time been replaced by a little frame dwelling of three rooms. It was but scantily furnished and he took a generous delight in ordering new furniture for it throughout.

My cheeks grow hot now when I think how shamelessly we took advantage of his bounty—I as well as my shrewd-eyed father and mother. I was too thoughtless and too happy to care very much about anything at the time, and my parents seemed to look upon the man who loved me as a well of supply furnished by an astounding Providence, of which it would be sheer ingratitude not to make the most. Father was given carte blanche to go to any of the shops in town, and have whatever he wished charged to Mr. Thorpe.

But the thing that turns my cheeks the hottest now to recall is that, after all this, father went to Mr. Thorpe, told him that the past year had been a hard one for the sheepmen, and asked him for a loan of a few hundred dollars. Mr. Thorpe, of course, sat down and wrote him a check for five hundred—an amount which represented five times its equivalent at the present time—and refused even a note in acknowledgment.

We were married in the big stone house of which I was to be the mistress. I was ignorant of the convention which decrees the wedding at the home of the bride, when it does not take place in the church. I thought it wonderful when Gilbert said we could be married in his house. and was in

a trance of delight at the preparations; a caterer was brought from Kansas City to furnish the wedding feast, and all the help drafted from the Paradise House to serve it; the town band furnished the music; and my gown—oh! the throbs of delight it gave me! Filmy lace over white satin, caught up with sprays of orange blossoms; and at my throat the bridegroom's gift; the Thorpe pearls reset in a magnificent necklace.

Then came a honeymoon trip to Kansas City. The most expensive hotels, more jewels, a sealskin coat, gowns of which I had never even dreamed; theaters, carriages, flowers; all the adjuncts of the life I had never known, a dazzling reality that eclipsed my wildest fancies.

The dazzle lasted for a time after our return home. I took my place as mistress of the big stone house, the wife of the richest man in all that western country. I could be driven into town behind the dashing blacks whenever I chose. I could go into any of the stores and buy anything that my fancy dictated. In sheer joy of extravagance I would frequently buy an expensive bottle of perfume, open it on the spot and turn it upside down upon my head, laughing as the delicious odor showered over my hair and face and down upon my clothing!

Just how long the spell lasted before it began to fade I do not now recall. But presently I found myself becoming disagreeably conscious of Gilbert's disfigurement. By degrees I began to feel myself repelled by his caresses. All his tenderness, all his generosity to me and mine, counted for nothing. I knew that he sensed the change in me; knew that it caused him suffering unspeakable. But already the inherent hardness in me was coming to the surface, and I did not exert myself to crush it.

And then I learned, with unutterable horror, that I was to become a mother. Motherhood had no place in my scheme of existence. I wanted only to laugh, dance, dress,

and be admired. The admiration and gratitude with which I had tried to repay Gilbert's devotion changed to indifference. I know now that at the bottom of the whole situation was the prime fact that we belonged to different worlds. We hadn't one idea, one taste, one thought, in common. All the jewels and laces and perfumes he could heap upon me couldn't take out of my veins the uncultured blood from which I had sprung. The superiority in him which I had instinctively recognized began to gall me. I became peevish, never-ceasing in my demands. And once—I shudder now, in spite of the long chasm of the years that lie between—I told him petulantly he'd better keep out of my sight if he wanted his child to have two ears!

If ever I commit murder I will never feel the horror that I felt when I saw what I had done to Gilbert Thorpe. The sickening gray pallor that spread over his features—the white line that drew like a tightening cord about his lips—the look in the kind, dark eyes as of one who suffers mortal agony. May a merciful God spare me from ever seeing their like again! I grew faint as he stood there, motionless, that agonized look fixed upon me. My breath caught in my throat with a rattle—my head fell back. I was senseless, and so I do not know what happened, except from what Tillie, our maid, told me afterward. But from her I know that even in that hideous moment his first thought was of me. He sprang to me, laid me tenderly back upon the pillows of the couch, shouted for Tillie, and told her to bring water.

When they had brought me to, and Tillie had gone back to her kitchen, Gilbert fell on his knees beside me, buried his head in my lap, and began to sob.

At first I was terrified. I had never seen a man weep before. But I don't think I felt pity for him as much as I did relief that my terrible deed was passing off without worse consequences. I drew his head to my bosom, stroked

his hair, murmured caressing words. Already I was cultivating the actress instinct that is dormant in every woman, and that I found later was to stand me in very good stead. The old thrill of power swept over me. I was mistress—I could do anything I chose! I could strike him a blow of almost mortal agony, and then make him come whimpering back to kiss the hand that struck it! Such is the power that the lioness feels in her cave, when by wile she has won the upper hand over her fierce mate.

Oh, I am primitive, as primitive as any blind force of nature, the feminine eternal—feline, wily, exultant, I know it now—know that that is the thing the ages of civilization have struggled away from, but have never subdued, any more than they have subdued the blind might of the hurricane or harnessed the typhoon.

I will not go into the drab details of disillusionment, the disillusionment that marriage inevitably brings and that must be counteracted by a real tie of abiding love if happiness is to result. As I lived day after day, mistress of the big stone house, learning the fineness of the man who loved me—a fineness which I hated—realizing that he lived in a world from which I, by every instinct of my nature, was shut out, no matter how hard he tried to lift me up to it, I began to hate him. That he sent for a music teacher to give me lessons on the grand piano, brought out an artist to instruct me in drawing and painting, a teacher to give me French, made not the slightest difference. These things might polish a little the outer surface of me—but within I remained a child of low blood, with hungerings and instincts the man who loved me could never fathom, much less satisfy.

And so, as I say, I began to hate him. And then—may God forgive me—to hate the child I was to bear. Small wonder, when it came, that it was puny, undersized, always ailing. The wonder is that it ever breathed at all, with such

mothering. I saw in it only the symbol of the tie that already galled me. And all of Gilbert's tender delight in the little being, all his indulgence to me as the mother of his child, his generous effort to fathom my every wish and to grant it, left me only indifferent. The little, helpless thing's wailing drove me nearly mad. I disclaimed all responsibility for its care, and Gilbert had a nurse come from Kansas City to take full charge.

As soon as I was able to be about I insisted upon taking up again the gayeties which I had been forced to give up, the Friday night dances in the town—having the young people of all the countryside come to the house to dance and sing and carouse—keeping such of them as I liked especially with me for a week afterward.

All Gilbert wanted was quiet evenings with the baby and me. I have never seen a man worship a child as he worshipped that one. I know now that it was all the tenderness of his nature, roused by his love for me and then thwarted, that flooded toward the child. His whole existence revolved about her. And as the weeks passed into months and she gave promise of becoming a normally healthy child, he fed his whole starved heart upon that hope.

For a year and a half this went on. Little Annie did not fulfill the promise of health, but remained puny and ailing, notwithstanding everything that could be done by doctors and nurses. The one thing she needed she did not have—that passionate, protecting mother-love which even the animals give their young. But I, less than the dumb brute, paid no heed to the little life that was flickering low, because I wanted to dance, and dress, and flirt.

I did not know then that I was virtually committing murder in the neglect of my child. But I know it now. And not all the bitter repentance of the long years since can wipe out that knowledge. Gilbert, in the clairvoyance of his great love for the child, knew it, and knew it bitterly.

So that at last even his generous forebearance gave way, and he reproached me openly. It is not strange that he could not forgive in me that which I can never, never forgive in myself.

I have no excuse to offer; if excuse there could ever be for such a course. The only explanation is that in the shallow frivolity of my heart there was no room for that noblest of instincts, the instinct of mother-love. The bitter tears that have washed the sparkle from my eyes cannot avail now; nor all the furrowing regrets that have worn the rose bloom out of my cheeks.

Whether the last shameless chapters of this story would have been written if I hadn't met Jack Norman, I do not know. Probably if it hadn't been he, it would have been some other man. But—I did meet him. First, at one of the dances in town. He had just come to Paradise from Chicago as the representative of an implement manufacturer. He opened a little office on the main street, with a shiny new sign bearing his name over the door. All the girls in town were wild to meet him. But he had no eyes for any of them after he saw me. And I? I found in him just that attraction which my husband had never had for me. We were both cast in the same common mold—both swayed by instincts of which the finer nature of Gilbert Thorpe was incapable. Jack was big and splendid of figure; he had red, sensuous lips, and eyes that could sparkle and glow with the same light my own held. We knew each other in the first swift glance of our meeting eyes. The fact that his wife and baby came out presently from Chicago to join him made not the slightest difference to either of us. We were drawn together by a force which we could only have resisted with the exertion of all our will power. And neither of us cared to exert it. The covert glances that soon began to be directed toward us when it was noticed in the town that the Thorpe surrey always drew up now in

front of the new office; the meaning looks that were exchanged behind our backs as we danced or rode together were nothing to us. If we could disregard the love of husband and child on the one side, and of wife and baby on the other, it is easy to surmise that mere looks would not trouble us.

That was the winter that roller skating first came out. Paradise promptly established a rink. It was in the "Opera House," a public hall above the town livery stable. But what did that matter? The new sport meant new excitement, added life and gayety. Jack was already proficient in it and, with my easy grace of movement, a few lessons sufficed to make me his equal. We quickly took our places as the champion skaters of the town. And so another bond was forged between us. Gilbert, of course, did not care for skating, any more than he did for dancing; the two things which had now become passions with me. Jack and I skated and danced, and danced and skated. What a pair we made! I can see the two of us now, and speak as impartially as though it were another person. I can see us, his black head above my golden one, two splendid creatures aglow with life and health, daring our small world—and all the worlds to come, too, for that matter—for the guilty joy of being together. We were natural mates. If Fate had been a little kinder—if it had been Jack who saw me that day when I was just turned eighteen, instead of Gilbert Thorpe— Oh, what is the use? Life catches us up, whirls us along, and not all our tears and protestations afterward can change the thing that is done.

And so Jack and I went on, meeting constantly, our eyes always greedy to dwell each in the other's, our hands always seeking to clasp as we danced or skated together. We became the talk of the town.

"Doesn't her husband know?" "Doesn't his wife know?" was whispered on every side. But presently it was a matter

of common knowledge that his wife did know. She was a pretty, delicate, little thing, with big, appealing blue eyes. And it was noised about that those same blue eyes were dimmed with many tears because of me, and that those soft, red lips voiced many pleadings to her errant husband.

Did I care for that? Not I! I cared for nothing but the tumult that surged within my heart. I had said "I love you," to Gilbert because he asked me to. The words had no particular meaning to me. Now, I knew what they meant. And I said them—said them with all the enticement of my rich red lips—all the alluring flashes that lived under the heavy lids of my dark eyes—said them, though I was a wife, to a man who was another woman's husband.

I had persuaded Gilbert to take a house in town for the winter. He demurred a little, for my extravagances had begun to tell upon his income. He had had as yet no returns for all the money he had invested in the ranch. Everybody took advantage of him shamelessly, knowing his lack of business experience and his splendid generosity. Everybody fleeced him, from my father and mother and myself, down to the meanest sheep herder in his employ. He began to look worried—to spend long hours going over his accounts. Once when his bills came in he spoke to me about the amounts; asked me if all the things I bought were necessary. I flared up and asked him if he wanted his wife to go about looking like a beggar. After that he said nothing more. I wanted to live in town where I could see Jack Norman every day, be with him every night at some festivity. If Gilbert knew my reason, he said nothing. Indeed, we had grown too far apart by this time to have it matter very much to him with whom I spent my frivolous hours. It was the expense of the move to town that made him hesitate, for of course I insisted upon my piano being taken in, and a good deal of the furniture, which could not be equaled by anything in Paradise. I intended to give parties, and I

wanted to make a display of my own expensive things. Gilbert finally decided to do as I wished, chiefly because the baby was more ailing than usual, and he wanted her to be where the doctor could keep his eye on her.

So to town we went! Oh, the mad, gay pleasure of that winter! Dances—skating parties—supper parties—parties of every kind with Jack and myself always the center of the gayeties—always together!

Then the baby became very ill. Gilbert was almost beside himself. He scarcely left her bedside; kept the doctor running over two and three times a day.

"It's only a bad cold," said the professional man. But with all he could do, it grew no better. And presently even he shook his head in alarm and pronounced the dread word —pneumonia.

Even this brought only a pause in my recklessness. I stayed in the sick room an hour or so now and then. But it made me restless and peevish. It took the color from my cheeks and the sparkle from my eyes, and I wanted to look well in Jack's sight. Besides, the child was Gilbert's child; the child of my flesh, to be sure, but not of my spirit. And all the time I sat in the sick room I was thinking of the man who had power to kindle the fire in my veins, whose lightest word could send it thrilling through my pulses.

The crisis came in the baby's illness. Her life hung in the balance. Gilbert, a ghost of a man with eyes hollowed by suffering and watching, never left her an instant.

On that last night I tried honestly to stay in the room with him. But as it drew near half-past seven—that was the hour the skating rink opened—I began to get restless. I could hear in my mind the strumming of the musical instruments, see the arrival of gay couples for the evening's pleasure. I could see Jack come in, look eagerly around for me.

I could endure it no longer. The face of the man with

whom I was infatuated blotted out the little tossing figure of my sick baby there on the bed. I said to myself that Gilbert, in his anxiety, overestimated the danger; that the doctor, always ready to urge whatever increased his bill, was simply seconding him. I could see no difference in the child's condition.

I rose, yawned, went to the door, looked back. The light was burning low. Gilbert sat on one side of the bed, the doctor on the other. What need was there of me? What good could I do if I stayed?

I slipped through the door, stole swiftly to my room, came back dressed, diamonds sparkling in my ears and on my fingers, my sealskin cloak richly black against the bright gold of my hair.

Gilbert looked up, started in amazement, rose from the bedside and came to me.

"Cora," he cried, "you're not going out to-night?"

"Why not?" I returned peevishly. "You and the doctor are here to do everything that's needed. Why should I stay?"

He stood there speechless—staring. "And you a mother," he whispered at length, half to himself. Then he stared at me again, as if trying to fathom what sort of creature I could be.

That maddened me. I threw to the winds what compunction I had left, turned and flung out of the door.

"I'll be at the rink. You can send for me if you need me," I called back over my shoulder.

And so, while my baby lay dying, I skated. Skated and laughed; flew over the glazed floor, swaying and dipping and whirling to the rhythm of the music, with Jack's arm about me, his eyes on mine, our hands clasped tight together.

We stayed until the last couple had gone—he and I. For, under pretense of undoing my skates and bundling me in my furs, he could whisper to me, and I could whisper back,

our lips very near—almost meeting. And so we prolonged it.

But we had to go at last. The attendant was waiting to put out the last light and lock the door.

Jack came home with me, opened the door. I drew back. I dreaded to go in. Instinct warned me of what was waiting there. I put it off as long as I could; stood there in the doorway, laughing and bantering Jack as usual, doing anything to prolong every precious second. But at length he took matters in his own hand. He said good night and went quickly down the snow-covered steps of the veranda.

Slowly I turned and went within. But I did not go to the sick room at once. I put off the evil moment until I could wait no longer. I first went to my own room, took off my wraps, stripped off my jewels, loosened my fluffy hair, and donned a soft, trailing cashmere robe.

And then, at last, I went in. At the sight that met my eyes a cry strangled in my throat. Gilbert hung over the little form on the bed, his shoulders shaken with convulsive sobs. Beside him stood the doctor, pale and anxious. And at the foot of the bed two neighbor women, whom Gilbert, half beside himself, had called in.

I ran forward—threw myself between the two men.

"What is it?" I gasped thickly. "What is happening?"

The two women sprang and caught at me, dragged me aside.

"Your baby is dying," the older one whispered to me. And even the whisper was stern, like her face.

Trembling, awed, I leaned forward and looked. Even my unpracticed eyes could see that the shadow of the Death Angel was creeping over the small, gray face.

"Oh, my baby! My baby!" I screamed madly. I threw aside the restraining women—pushed the doctor away—fell on my knees at the bedside. I clasped the little form in an agony of remorse and grief.

But Gilbert, white and hard, with blazing eyes that accused me as no words could have done, took me by the shoulders and thrust me aside. The first time he ever touched me ungently in his life. All his agonized love for the child I had given him turned into fury at its unnatural mother.

Then he stooped over the bed and lifted the baby in his arms, as if he could hold back by his frantic clasp the unspeakable thing that was taking her from him. But, even as he did so, the last faint breath flickered over the little purple lips, and the little head rolled back.

Gilbert never forgave me. Gentle and tender as he was, I had done the one thing for which he could find no pardon. The townspeople, too, took up his cause. It spread swiftly from lip to lip that I was skating with Jack Norman while my child lay dying. The wife of the banker went out of the way to show me a very cold shoulder. She was the social arbitress of Paradise and where she led, the other women flocked to follow. It meant nothing to me at the moment. It was not until afterward that I realized what social ostracism meant. Just then, I could see nothing—think nothing—but Jack—Jack—Jack!

I was ready to go to any length now. The tragedy of it was that he began to cool. I used all my enticements. I taunted him. I even descended to tears and prayers to beg him to tell me what was the matter. But all he would say was, "We've got to stop it, Cody." ("Cody" was his pet name for me, which I never allowed anyone else to use.)

I learned afterward that the banker had gone to him and said bluntly, "We won't stand for what you're doing, Norman. You've got to stop this talk about yourself and Mrs. Thorpe—or get out."

Jack was a good business man. He would not wreck his business career for what he knew was nothing but a mad infatuation. That was the depth of the tragedy for me. He could stop and count costs, while I counted nothing—

recked nothing—would have thrown everything to the winds for him. Honor! I laughed bitterly in my soul at the word. What honor has a woman who has given herself to a husband she doesn't love?

To bring a dismal end to everything, as far as I was concerned, Gilbert insisted upon moving back to the ranch. The edict sounded the death knell to the hope that remained to me of winning Jack back. I stormed at Gilbert—wept—coaxed. But his love for me was dead; as dead as the little child over whose cold form he had sobbed the agonized sobs of a man's heartbreak. And sternly, coldly he gave the orders for our removal.

The isolation of the lonely ranch house was terrible to me, following as close as it did upon Gilbert's coldness and the loss of Jack. To make matters unbearable, a belated sense of motherhood began to rise in me and bring the sharp tortures of remorse. The house seemed to shriek with emptiness, now that the baby was gone. I kept running across reminders of her with maddening frequency; one of the toys with which Gilbert had loaded her; a little dress; a sock; a piece of the tiny silver set Gilbert had had engraved with her name. Something was always turning up in unexpected places to reproach me.

Everything combined to drive me to desperation. That is what I tell myself now when I look back over the year that followed; the one pitiful, small excuse for the madness into which I plunged.

Among the sheep herders in my husband's employ was a fellow named Ben Fraser, an indolent ne'er-do-well whose aim in life never soared above having enough to eat, and doing as little work as possible. There was about him the kind of vagabondish grace which frequently characterizes that temperament. Red and sensuous of lip, merry of eye, he strutted about like a cock in the pit, with a roving glance always ready to note any petticoat that might be in

the vicinity. And he could strum a guitar until the instrument seemed a thing alive with mad, mirthful music.

I had seen him at some of the country dances, where he and his guitar were always in demand, and his eye had caught mine now and then when he came to the house to ask my husband about the work, or get his wages. It would have probably gone at that, if, in Gilbert's absence, he had not taken advantage of it to come to the kitchen and hang around Tillie. He brought his guitar with him, of course. The gay strumming drew my attention. Desperate with the loneliness of the ranch and tortured by my thoughts I seized upon it as a momentary distraction, and asked him into the living room. I quickly fitted piano accompaniments to the airs he played on his guitar, and we had merry evenings together.

Gilbert's horror when he learned that I had received one of his sheep herders in our house on a social footing was unspeakable. This, alone, would have urged me on in my course.

But the fact was that I found Ben diverting. The low breeding was in his blood, as it was in mine. Gilbert Thorpe was aristocratic to the very ends of his tapering fingers. Between Ben and me was the same sort of bond that had drawn Jack and me together—the sort of bond that Gilbert could not even understand.

The thing had started during a brief absence of Gilbert's, in Kansas City. Soon after his return from there he was obliged to go to New York. Money matters had gone from bad to worse with him. All of the capital he had brought with him was gone. Even his credit—unlimited for years—was becoming strained. The fine breed of sheep with which he had stocked the ranch was not adapted to the rigors of the prairie climate, and had died off by the thousand. He was on the verge of bankruptcy. He must go back to his family and obtain sufficient money to extri-

cate him from his present difficulties or lose everything.

Ben needed only this opportunity. He was always to be found in the house. Night after night our gay music rang out, and night after night I let his little familiarities go unrepulsed. Not because I cared for him particularly, or anticipated in the least what might become of it, but merely because it was my nature to accept such things, and I was in no state of mind to resist.

The news of what went on at the Thorpe place spread quickly to Paradise, of course. And when I went to town now, I was slighted by even the few who had stood by me through the scandal of my affair with Jack and the death of my child. The sense of caste was not strong in the pioneers of the western prairies. But for the wife of Gilbert Thorpe to stoop to a common sheep herder was too much—even for them.

Gilbert returned in a month or so. And with him came his mother. She was a typical *grande dame* of the old school; breeding in every line of her patrician features, in her fine hands, so like Gilbert's, in every fold of the heavy black silk that clothed her spare form, in the delicacy of the lace she always wore at throat and wrists. I looked at her; I thought of my own mother, wide of hip, hard of lip and eye, and I hated Mrs. Thorpe. Hated her as I had come to hate the man who had poured out at my swine-feet the pearls of a generous, fine love.

She tried at first to meet me courteously, though I made it hard enough for her, you may be sure. But when she saw Ben and learned the state of affairs, she made no effort to conceal the antipathy she felt.

She had brought money with her, sufficient to extricate her son from his difficulties and give him a fresh start. But as soon as she learned what I had done—and was doing—she refused absolutely the aid she had come to bring.

Of course, there were plenty of tongues to drop hints to

her. Gilbert had taken her in to stay at the hotel in Paradise when he discovered Ben's friendship with me, in the hope that it might be kept from her. But, with her woman's intuition, she knew something was wrong and was not long in finding out what it was. Nor was she long, either, in learning of my affair with Jack, and the circumstances of the baby's death.

It was toward evening when she arrived. Supper passed in a strained atmosphere; so strained, indeed, that it seemed to me it must break, through sheer brittleness.

When it was over, Gilbert called me into the library. She sat there with him. I knew at once that I had been called before a tribunal. And all the stubborn defiance of my nature rose. My eyes that could glow so enticingly, blazed with a hard fire. I threw up my head and stood there.

"Well?" I flung out, while the two of them eyed me.

"Sit down, Cora," said Gilbert.

"Thank you. An invitation to sit down in my own house is the one thing I was waiting for."

Mrs. Thorpe's eyes blazed at the thrust, and she would have retorted sharply, but Gilbert held up a hand for silence. Then he came up to me—looked me in the eyes steadily, quietly, coldly.

"You are not going to call Ben Fraser into this house again," he said, in his quiet voice.

"Why not, I'd like to know?" came from between my set lips.

"You do know. Perfectly well."

"You had to bring your mother and her money out here to back you up before you dared say a thing like this to me!" I taunted him.

"What I dared not do, Cora, was to break through the last barriers of respect with which I have always surrounded you. Now you have made that necessary by your own rash acts. I listen to nothing people try to tell me about you.

I accuse you of nothing. I merely tell you what your course is to be in the future."

His quiet courtesy maddened me.

"It isn't enough that you bring me out here to this old ranch," I broke out hotly. "It isn't enough that you cut me off from everybody and everything—but you must forbid me even to amuse myself!"

"You will find another way to amuse yourself—or you will not remain in my house!"

A threat! From the man who had been at my feet, eager to gratify my every whim.

A torrent of rage that turned me white poured over me from head to foot. I began a tirade, resorting to language that sent the patrician mother pale, and made Gilbert hang his head in bitter humiliation.

At last Mrs. Thorpe could stand it no longer. "Stop!" she cried, with an imperious lift of her hand. "We will not discuss whether you have been lied about or ill-treated. I know my son. And I knew you, oniy too well, the moment my eyes fell upon you! There is only one thing to be settled. And that is going to be settled here and now. Gilbert is on the verge of bankruptcy."

"Is that my fault?" I interrupted hotly.

"Largely, yes!" she returned. "You have helped to fleece him out of everything he possessed; you and your vulgar family."

"Mother! Mother! Please—" broke in Gilbert pleadingly. But she waved him aside with her imperious hand. The barriers had been broken, and she gave vent to the wrath she had long restrained for her son's sake!

"You have disgraced yourself—disgraced my son—disgraced us all, by your conduct! You are worse than a common woman of the streets! Worse, I say, for they have the excuse of having to earn their living that way——"

"Hush, mother! Hush, for my sake!" Gilbert tried again

to restrain her. But again she swept his opposition aside:

"In all my long life I never before even heard of a woman who would laugh and dance and flirt while her baby lay dying! And as though all the rest of it were not enough, now you must stoop still lower. You, the wife of Gilbert Thorpe, who has tried generously to raise you to a place beside him, you dare to demean yourself with a low blackguard who isn't even allowed in the house when your husband is here! It is beyond all human decency. You, who have had nothing but tenderness, generosity, consideration, from the husband you are not fit even to speak to. You, to pollute our honorable name. To drag it in the common filth——"

At that something in me gave way. I had listened—white, hard. But now I broke in. I threw back my head and laughed; laughed shrilly and long.

I had been indiscreet, it is true. But up to this time I had not transgressed the actual letter of my marriage vows. With Jack Norman, it had been an infatuation from which he had withdrawn. With Ben Fraser, it was merely an effort to amuse myself. The unjust taunt goaded me over the last barrier of decency that remained within me.

"Your honorable name!" I shrieked wildly. "Your honorable name! I'll show you now what I'll do to your honorable name!" I caught up my cloak and ran out.

Out—out—through the spitting sleet of a winter night—out where the line of the low stone bunk house bulked in the blackness. I pounded on Ben's door.

Ben opened it, blinked into the darkness. When he saw who it was, he exclaimed softly, in astonishment. He came slowly to me—took me by the shoulders—peered into my face. I stepped in. The door swung to behind me. His eyes were fastened on my face, burning white and red, on my golden hair, tossed and damp from the storm.

That—may heaven forgive me—is my story. Only one

course remained to Gilbert Thorpe after that night. He divorced me. His mother paid up his debts and took him to Colorado in an effort to restore his health. Delicate ever since the accident of years before, the death of his child and the scandal I brought upon him, had wrecked him completely.

I learned later that he had partly recovered his health and had married a woman in his own class. I am sure this was the woman with whom he had been in love before his disfigurement, and whom he had been too sensitive to claim after it, but who had always remained true to him. He passed a few peaceful, happy years before his early death. But I know that often, when the winter storms raged, he looked out past the light and warmth of his luxurious home into the night, and his heart went out with an aching throb to that lonely little grave on the prairie, and a mist of sorrow gathered in his kind, dark eyes.

As for me, I had grown stolid with the constant resistance to that remorse that for long years has gnawed at my heart. Remorse for all that I had—and threw away!

Not so much worldly goods—though they are not to be despised when one's back aches and one's shoulders droop with a round of unending drudgery. But in my true hours, it is remorse for the love I threw away and, most of all, for the cherishing I refused to the little life entrusted to me; the delicate child I mothered in whose veins ran the blue blood of the Thorpes, and whom I might have reared to lovely young womanhood.

Sometimes, when the wind is low at twilight, the days of the past come flitting back and live again. I smell the fragrance of the wild plum blossoms abloom by the creek near the big stone house when I went there as its mistress; the tenderness of those first days of my marriage rushes back upon me. I can hear Gilbert singing; he had a beautiful tenor voice and I soon learned to play his accompani-

ments, and in the fragrant twilights we would sing and play together. With them comes the enchantment of that new life into which I had stepped, and which was all dazzle and gayety and joy.

I see again the look of love in the kind, dark eyes of the man who was my husband. Ah, that I had never learned to look for it in the eyes of other men!

After the divorce, I cajoled Ben Fraser into marrying me. Then I scraped together enough money to buy a little chicken ranch. There we have lived; stolidly, drably, through the dragging years. The prairie winds have leathered my skin, the prairie snows have grayed my hair, the furrowing years have set their mark upon my once-smooth brow. I am broad of hip, hard of lip and of eye, like my mother. A child of low breeding I was born, and a child of such breeding will I live out my days.

For a long time I sent Ben into town with the eggs and poultry that brought us our scanty living. I did not want to be recognized. I did not want to encounter cold stares and turned shoulders where once I had been sought after, and flattered and courted.

But now I go in without fear. In the rapidly changing conditions there are few left in Paradise who remember my story; and none at all would recognize in the drab, wrinkled old woman with the sunbonnet pulled down over her face, the woman who was once called the "Rose of Paradise."

IV

The Unknown Road

ALONG in the summer of 1901 I was sojourning for a few days in the little town of Calias on the Illinois Central Road, engaged in the laborious task of collecting information about the crops. I was stopping at the only respectable hotel the village boasted of. The landlord, a gossipy, genial fellow, had formerly been a hotel clerk in Denver and remembered me as an indomitable investigator into the mysteries of his register in old days. It was to this circumstance that I was indebted for an inside glimpse into the strange, eventful history I am about to relate.

The village was suffering at the time from the annual influx of tramps, and my host had had his full share of the infliction, or, as he called it, the inflation.

"The devil take them all," he said in a burst of honest indignation, but, suddenly checking himself, he added, "and still, poor devils, they are perhaps not all to blame for their miseries. There's a case," he continued, "that I have somehow taken an unaccountable interest in because it don't seem quite a common case of tramp."

The "case" referred to was sitting on the top of an empty beer keg, munching a crust of bread and seeming to pay no attention to what was going on around him, except when the landlord's glance turned in his direction, when he would make an uneasy movement and pull his cap down over his eyes as if seeking to hide his countenance.

"I have met that man somewhere," pursued the landlord, "and I'm going to find out where. I think I'll give him a bed for the night, just for fun." And he followed up his

resolve by at once going to the stranger and proffering him a shelter for the night. As the man turned around to say a word of thanks, the landlord, after a keen look into the other's face, seized him sharply by the arm, and exclaimed: "Look here, haven't I met you somewhere before?"

"That's hardly likely," said the tramp, "for I have never been in this part of the country till now."

"Isn't your name Johnson, and weren't you a doctor of medicine in Vermont once?"

The effect of this question was to start the stranger to his feet and to cause the sweat to stand in beads upon his brow.

"For God's sake," he gasped, in a beseeching tone, "don't say a word! You wouldn't give me away, would you? How did you know me? Do you know who I am?"

"If I'm not mistaken, I think I know you pretty well. I have a good memory for faces—it's my business, you know. So your name is Johnson, then?"

"Well, what if it is," said the stranger, sullenly. "Did you never meet a fellow of that name before?"

"You gave yourself away a minute ago," said the landlord. "Now don't try and bluff, and don't be scared about me. I know some things that might astonish people. Don't you know what became of Josephine Moore?"

"I heard that she had gone to the devil," said Johnson, "and I suppose that's the case. I know I have, and if you mean to give me up, why——"

"Not a bit of it," said the landlord. "I mean to give you a bed. I suppose you led her to the devil, as you say, but she never got quite there. She found her way home in the long run."

The tramp began to look more nervous than ever.

"Do you mean that she went back to her father's house?" he asked, anxiously.

"Well, she got there finally, I believe, but before that she

was picked up in Denver as a common vagrant and sent to the Bridewell. Somebody, I won't say who, got her out, and she went home East. She died shortly after."

This statement appeared to relieve the mind of Johnson, and he was visibly anxious to escape further investigation by accepting the offer of shelter. He was put into a vacant room, where he crept into a "shakedown" in the corner, drew a quilt over his head, and, to all appearances, fell asleep.

We did not retire to rest that night, for the landlord was considerably wrought up over the meeting, and, as may be imagined, I was all agog to learn the details of the mystery.

"What a strange chance it was that brought him here," said the landlord. "It is just fifteen years ago this very month that Dr. Johnson disappeared from his home and he has never been seen or heard of since."

"Who is he? And who was Josephine Moore? And what did he run away for? And why did she jump into the Bridewell?" said I.

"I have good reasons for keeping this thing out of sight, as no good could ever come now of its publication, and maybe lots of trouble. Besides, I couldn't identify him, and if I could— Tell you what I will do," he said, after a reflective pause. "I will tell you about it, but only on condition that you give me your word of honor not to write it up for the papers. I have my reasons."

I reluctantly gave him my pledge, and he forthwith put me in possession of a family history which offers a striking illustration of the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction. The narrative ran somewhat as follows:

Not very long ago a woman was arrested in Denver near Polk Street bridge. She was evidently a stranger in the city, and it was remarked that while her clothes denoted a condition of abject poverty the face was one of singular beauty, and wore an expression such as belongs only to well-

bred people. On being taken to the police, she was denounced as an old bummer, and sentenced as such to the usual term in the Bridewell. She gave her name to the magistrate as Dorothy White, but on searching her, as is customary, the policeman found a small, faded pocketbook containing a card, one old photograph, and a few apparently unimportant memoranda. These were exhibited to the privileged professional gentlemen at the station, and that seemed to be the end of it.

To only one man in the city did these scraps convey any significance and he, for reason best known to himself, chose to give his surmises no publicity. This man was none other than my landlord, then a clerk in one of our hotels.

"I learned the whole truth afterward," said he, "and found that my suspicions had been correct."

This woman was the daughter of a wealthy gentleman of Vermont. His name was Moore. He was a haughty, imperious man, proud of his wealth, and still prouder of his lineage. His only child, a daughter, was the joy and pride of his heart. Upon her he lavished all the affection of his nature; everything that money could buy was used for her mental and physical nurture. A bright and beautiful girl she grew up to be, excelling in all the accomplishments that combine to make a charming woman.

The time came when Josephine was of marriageable age, and this was an event to which the father had long looked forward with eager expectancy, for he had set his heart on marrying her to a young nephew who bore the family name, so that the possessions might descend in an unbroken line to his posterity.

The nephew was a young man of negative mental qualities, but irreproachable in his conduct, and devotedly attached to his beautiful cousin. Josephine, on the other hand, regarded her fiancé with only a mild respect, and she was decidedly averse to marrying him. She preferred the com-

panionship of a young medical student, between whom and herself there existed, it was whispered, a feeling warmer than esteem. In fact, the gossips remarked that the flirtation between young Johnson and Josephine was getting to a point where it was time to put a stop to it.

By and by matters came to a crisis. The daughter was offered the alternative of marrying her cousin, or of being disinherited, and the girl, knowing the temper of her father when his will was thwarted, after a struggle to have her own way, succumbed.

The marriage took place; the happy couple went through their honeymoon like any other happy couple, and so the romance was at an end—for the time being.

To all appearances they were what the world would call a perfectly well-mated couple—she gracing her position with becoming dignity, and he devoting himself to her with an affectionate solicitude that could not but win her respect.

About a year after an heir to the house of Moore came into the world there arrived again in the neighborhood the young physician, Johnson. Being of respectable connections, he very soon established a good practice, and there seemed to be no reason why he should not resume his acquaintance with the friends of his youth. In fact, he became a frequent visitor to their home, and was welcomed both by the husband and wife as an old friend. The husband and the doctor became fast friends so that when one day the former was seized with a serious illness, the latter was sent for to attend him. The illness assumed an alarming phase, and after lingering in sore agony for many days the husband died.

His death made the customary stir and tumult among the relatives; the widow put on her weeds and received with quiet resignation the condolences of her friends, and the family physician handed in his certificate, and attended the funeral.

It was then that the conduct of the physician began to arouse the curiosity of some of the relatives, and people who have a happy knack of "putting this and that together" were not slow in hinting that there was something wrong somewhere. These murmurs grew more ominous as the days went on, and eventually it was suggested by a friend of the family that the body be exhumed, and an examination made.

When Johnson was informed of the intention to exhume the remains he turned deadly pale, but controlling himself with an effort he sought to pooh-pooh the matter, until seeing he could not dissuade the relatives, he professed his acquiescence and intimated his entire willingness to assist at the autopsy.

But on the day when the remains of young Moore were to be exhumed and submitted to an examination of experts, Dr. Johnson was nowhere to be found. He had disappeared.

The post mortem revealed quite clearly the fact that Moore had been poisoned. The missing physician was at once pointed out as the culprit, and as a natural consequence tongues began to be busy in defaming the unhappy widow. His intimacy with the family and his former friendship with Mrs. Moore were accepted as proof that here was a pair of guilty ones, and though none had dared to point the finger of suspicion at her, there were not wanting those who circulated bits of insidious gossip which slowly sapped her fair frame and began to make life a weariness to her.

Worst of all, her father, to whose wish she had sacrificed her first maidenly love, turned his stern face coldly upon her. She had nothing now left to her but her boy.

One evening, immediately succeeding the occurrences just narrated, the child was about to repeat this "Now I lay me," when, looking up into his mother's face, he lisped out these words, terrible to a mother's heart: "Mamma, my Gra'pa says I must only say God bless Papa now."

The horrible truth flashed on her mind that her father suspected her of complicity in the murder of her husband.

The next day a new thing was furnished the gossips of the district by the disappearance of Mrs. Moore.

Had she gone to the partner of her guilt? Ah, murder, they say, will out, but who shall say on what day the mysteries of the human heart are to be unveiled!

Let the reader here imagine for himself where that doubly, trebly forsaken woman went. Did she sneak away from her home and child to unite her fortunes with a murderer and a seducer? Did she burst away from her home in wrath and agony, seeing nothing in the garden that she loved but the angel with the flaming sword, forbidding her to reënter the hallowed doors? Or did she wander forth, like Hagar in the desert, only without the solace of Hagar—her only boy—despair in her soul, and seeking after a just retribution, which God only knew was her recompense?

All that was known was that Josephine Moore was gone from her home, and only a few, a very few kindly souls had the courage to say that perhaps after all she was more sinned against than sinning.

During the Colvin Administration one afternoon a shabbily dressed woman, who had all the appearance of a lady, came into the mayor's office and made a piteous appeal to His Honor. She said her father was ill and she must go to him.

"Where does your father live?" asked the Mayor.

"In Vermont," said the woman, "It's far away, but much depends on this—more than I can tell you, and I haven't a penny nor a friend in the world. Can't you help me on?"

The good-hearted Mayor perceived something above the common in his petitioner, and with his accustomed generosity, he, after suitable inquiry, helped her along to her destination.

Just at this time in his residence in Vermont an old man

was lying in the daily expectation of death. His worldly affairs had all been arranged. One evening he was told that a poor woman, a miserable looking craeture, had been driven away from his door.

"Take her into the kitchen," said the dying man, "if she comes back again, and give her something to eat."

The next night she came again and they gave her to eat and drink. She was a forlorn, haggard, almost forbidding object, with hollow, bloodshot eyes, and hunger-bitten cheeks.

She said to the servant: "My father is ill, and I want to see him."

The servant went up to the sick man and told him the woman down there was mad. They sent her away.

The next day she came back to the house. She said to the housekeeper: "Tell Mr. Moore that I am his daughter Josephine, and that I must see him."

"His daughter," said the housekeeper, "has been dead many years. You must get away from here, my poor woman."

"Does my father know that his daughter is dead?"

"He has known that long ago. But go away from here, or you'll disturb him. He's very ill."

"It's because he's ill that I must see him, and that at once. Let me go to him, and he will know me."

The impassioned creature broke past the ancient servitor and rushed up the long flight of stairs till she reached the bedside of the dying man. A physician and other attendants there tried to intercept her, but she reached the bed, and kneeling down cried out:

"Father! I am Josephine! Don't you know me?"

Ragged, wayworn, defaced by misery, sorrow, want and wrong, it was perhaps no wonder that the sick man hardly recognized his daughter. Yet when he did, everything was done to make her comfortable. The poor woman did not

live long after that. Misery and degradation had done for her. She died within a few weeks after her bitter and sad homecoming.

When the landlord ended his recital the dawn was peeping through the casement and I went to bed. Before I fell asleep, however, I heard a sound outside my window, and peeping cautiously out, I was amazed to see our tramp and the landlord engaged in a low but earnest conversation. Johnson had a small bundle in his hand, and after saying a hurried good-by, he made his way rapidly down the dusty road and was lost to my view.

"In the name of all that's wonderful," I said to the landlord the next morning, "what prompted you to help that scoundrel escape? Aren't you sure of your man?"

"As sure as I am of my breakfast," he returned, "but I have another secret to tell you since I have trusted you so far. I would not tell you if you had not seen me let him go."

"What is that?" I asked in wonder.

"That man you saw go from my house this morning—you will keep this to yourself?"

"Surely."

"He is my wife's only brother."

"One thing more—was Josephine Moore guilty?"

"I would give the world to know," said the landlord, "but he would not tell, and now we may never know that mystery."

Last winter a wretched vagrant was found half dead from hunger and cold on the streets of Denver, and was carried to the county hospital. He absolutely refused to give his name, or tell where he came from, so he was entered as plain John Smith. He was dying.

About two hours before the end came, he called the nurse to his bedside, and, fumbling in his breast for something, drew forth a tattered and greasy pocketbook.

"There's nothing in it that's of importance to anyone

here," he gasped. "There is one man only it could have any meaning for," he added, breathing hard as he neared the grim portal. "If you have any pity for a poor dying man, will you send this to the landlord of the hotel of Calias?"

"I promise to do it," said the nurse.

His thin wan fingers tightened for a moment on the pocketbook, and then relaxed their hold.

The tramp had entered upon the unknown road we must all travel. He was dead!

The pocketbook contained nothing but an old letter, and this was the contents:

"When I sought you it was to kill you. I meant to do it and then die myself. But when I saw you and found what you had become, I turned away. I thank God the guilt of blood is not on my soul, as it is on yours. Harry, I once loved you—loved you blindly, madly. And because of this love, I once felt, I forgive you.

"Yet through your horrible act I was driven a wanderer upon the face of the earth. You brought upon me the scorn and wrath of my kindred and the darkest suspicion of the world. You will die in wretchedness and woe, and will be buried in a pauper's grave. This is the reward of your sin. It is not what I, in all my misery, would wish for you.

"JOSEPHINE MOORE."

V

The Unguided Girl

HEN I got home at eight, one stormy November night, off one of the hardest cases I had ever nursed, I vowed I wouldn't go out again, under any circumstances, until I was thoroughly rested.

But when Dr. Earle called me, at midnight, to come to Mercy and take an emergency operative case, I dressed and went.

I simply could not refuse Dr. Earle, after the way he had saved my life by getting hold of a burst appendix just in time. Some of the nurses called me Dr. Earle's pet, but if I am, it is because I am willing to work for him until I drop, and then get up and work some more.

But if I had known that night what was ahead, I wonder if I would have gone.

The patient was still in the surgery when my taxi reached the hospital, and while I got her bed ready and filled hot water bags, I wondered about her. Even after ten years, every new case was an adventure to me.

From the chart I learned her name was Mrs. Helen Johnston, but I didn't dream she was *the* Mrs. Johnston. As soon as they wheeled her in from the operating room I got too busy to do any wondering, what with sponging her lips, keeping the water bottles just warm enough, feeling her pulse, attending to the Murphy drip, and giving hypos every hour, to keep her heart up. I didn't need Dr. Earle's warning to tell me it was doubtful if we could pull her through.

I could see that in health she was a very beautiful woman.

She was in her early thirties, of the type that wouldn't fade quickly. Dark hair that curled slightly framed an oval face. And when she finally opened them, I saw big soft brown eyes that dominated her whole being.

I was peculiarly attracted to her from the first, and made up my mind she must live. Then I found out that she didn't want to.

No one was allowed to see her except her husband, who came for five minutes every afternoon. His visits always occurred when I was off duty. Otherwise I should have recognized him.

Her room was filled with flowers, and we kept the accident ward and the children's department supplied with the overflow. The office was worked overtime answering phone calls regarding her condition. But I was kept busy and didn't tumble to who she was.

At the end of the second week, Dr. Earle called me into the chart room, and said, "Miss Blake, to my surprise, your patient has rallied physically. Still she isn't doing well. She strikes me as not giving a hang. Try and rouse her."

But rousing her wasn't easy. It was just as Dr. Earle said; she wasn't interested in anything.

I wondered a good deal about it, especially after Miss Baldwin, the pretty nurse who relieved me in the afternoons, said one night, as we were having coffee in the diet kitchen:

"I can't imagine what makes Fourteen so indifferent. When they found her appendix burst I never thought she'd live. But she has, and still she is so apathetic. Her husband is the handsomest, most wonderful man, and he's perfectly crazy about her." Miss Baldwin always gushed.

We nurses see some strange things, and are often accused of getting hard; but a patient that doesn't want to get well arouses every bit of my Scotch-Irish fighting blood, and I made up my mind I'd *make* Mrs. Johnston want to get well.

One evening, I lost patience, and said crossly, "I'm doing my best; why don't you help?"

She gave me one of her wonderfully sweet smiles. "What a little, red-headed spitfire it is," she replied, whimsically. Then, soberly, "I'm not getting well, Miss Blake, and I'm glad. I'm going to tell you why. I've got to tell somebody."

"Better go to sleep now," I urged, "and talk to-morrow."

Ten years of experience had taught me that patients often tell their nurses things that, when they're well again, they'd give a fortune to have unsaid. There's something about our uniforms and caps, I guess, that makes 'em want to make father confessors of us, and "tell all."

"Sleep doesn't matter," she insisted. "I may lose courage if I wait, and I want to tell you, so that you can help other women and girls. I wouldn't be telling this, if I weren't going to die, but I am. Please close the door tightly, and see that nobody is in the hall."

When I had satisfied her by looking out, and had shut the door, she began:

"For sixteen years I have carried a burden, with no one to share it. But I feel, somehow, that *you* will understand. Besides, in your work you come into contact with many people, and I want you to warn every young girl you possibly can that if she makes the mistake I did she will never be done paying. How I have paid!"

She was extremely agitated, and I hastily put a thermometer between her lips.

"No, you won't find me feverish," she smiled, as I read the instrument, and she was right. There was nothing to do but humor her; so I sat down to listen, then suddenly looked around quickly, for I fancied I heard the door creak. But it was still shut and we were alone.

"As you probably know, I am Hubert Johnston's wife," she stated, while I hoped my face did not register the amaze-

ment I felt. No wonder she had had flowers and telephone messages! She was perhaps the most beloved woman in the city.

Hubert Johnston was the most prominent minister in the city. One of those popular preachers that the crowds flock to hear. Hundreds were turned away every week from his Sunday evening services. He was a great orator, and had a magnetic personality, but I had never gone to hear him. I had once known him, back in the home town. Not as the great doctor of divinity, but as "Johnnie" Johnston. He was a senior in high school when I was a freshman.

Even then he had been handsome and magnetic; but he was terribly wild and had broken many a heart—and worse.

When he was eighteen, his folks moved away. But we heard of them occasionally. Once the report was that Johnnie was attending college; then that he had been suspended for improper conduct.

The older folks sighed, and said they knew that boy would never come to any good. Then the village was filled with amazement to learn that he had been converted and was studying for the ministry.

Eventually he had become the noted, popular Dr. Johnston.

Two years ago he had accepted a call to the largest church in the city where I had trained, and in which I had stayed to nurse for Dr. Earle. But while I rejoiced to know of the good he was doing, somehow, I had never cared to go and hear "Johnnie" Johnston tell folks how to be good. A case of "a prophet in his own country!"

We had met on the street a couple of times but he had not recognized me; for there's a lot of difference in the looks of an awkward, red-haired girl of fifteen with pig tails, and a mature woman of thirty, whose "crown of glory" has turned auburn, and is kept marcelled.

"I know what I am saying," my patient was continuing,

while my mind had raced back fifteen years, "and I know the shock I am giving you, but I shall soon be gone, and it won't matter. My experience may help someone else.

"My mother died when I was small, and I was brought up by my father and our negro mammy. Both father and mammy adored me, but he was a busy doctor and away from home most of the time, and she was too ignorant to give a young, vital girl the needed training.

"The year I was seventeen father took a young doctor in to help him."

My patient stopped to rest, but would not listen to any suggestion of stopping and finishing another time.

"Richard Lindsay, or 'Dr. Dick,' as we called him, was handsome and hypnotic, and father was pleased when his assistant began paying attention to me.

"I was romantic, and delighted to be singled out when every eligible woman in town, and some of the married ones, were trying for his favor.

"I went with him on his long drives into the country, and spent hours a day with him. He was devotion and respect itself. I daily expected a proposal of marriage. But what he did propose was—something else. If only I had gone to my father for advice!" Her voice was near breaking.

"But" —she went on determinedly— "I was young and was fairly mesmerized by Dr. Dick, and was so afraid of losing his love, that I took the surest way of losing it. I listened to his proposal.

"He explained that a misanthrope uncle had left him several hundred thousand dollars, only in the event he didn't marry until he was thirty. He was twenty-nine now. I afterwards found out this was only one of his many lies.

"He urged that our love need not be denied, because of this whim on his uncle's part; that we would be actually married in spirit and, as soon as he fell into his inheritance.

we would have our spiritual union made legal. He painted enticing pictures of the things we should do then; the lands we should visit and the sights we should see. Oh, it was fairyland, as he described it. At seventeen, one is very credulous!" A faint sarcasm touched her face, and was gone.

"We actually read the marriage ceremony together, and when he said that old, old thing men are always saying, that before God I was his wife, it all seemed very sacred and sweet to me.

"I was very immature, so it was to be expected that in a few weeks my psuedo-husband would tire of me. He soon transferred his attentions to a married woman, and was so flagrant that my father asked him to leave.

"Dr. Dick cast me off as one discards an old shoe. I was too proud to beg him to be true. Even my childish heart realized that I had forfeited all hope of his love. Nobody dreamed of the aching, bruised spirit he left behind when he went, for my Southern blood enabled me to hold my head high.

"But I never felt I was a 'bad woman,' I felt rather as a young wife who had been deserted. I always thought of myself as Dick's wife.

"My immaturity had saved me from consequences of my foolish act, and for four years I devoted myself to my studies and music. I never expected to marry; for I felt no man would understand.

"Then Hubert came." Her face lit up with love and tenderness.

"He was our pastor, and young as he was, his success was phenomenal then, as it is now. His sermons fairly broke one's heart with their sympathy and appealingness, and when he preached his now famous Mary Magdalene sermon for the first time, almost everybody in the congregation wept.

"He was so tender of the woman who had made a mistake; and how he scorned the men for keeping a fallen woman down, and the women too, for not lending a helping hand. I felt that here at last, was a man who could really understand my experience."

She stopped to rest, and while I gave her a drink of water, the thought occurred to me that, of all men, he ought to understand, for he had caused enough girls to make the same mistake, before he got religion.

"As church organist," she went on, "I saw a great deal of our young pastor, and after six months of ideal friendship he asked me to marry him. I felt greatly honored, but sad; for I must tell him. I knew now that the feeling I had had for Dick, was nothing but infatuation.

"One night by the firelight, I tried to tell Hubert about Dick, but he cut me off with, 'Don't distress yourself, my darling. I understand perfectly. To me you are the purest girl in the world.'

"I thanked God that night for such an understanding heart in a man and for such a love, and joyfully began preparations for our wedding. It was not until long afterwards that I realized he had not really understood at all, and had thought I was simply censuring myself for permitting Dick to make love to me. Hubert was too idealistic to understand anything sordid.

"We were ideally happy for two years, and then a chance remark told me that if my husband knew his judgment would be very severe; that if he had understood he would not have married me.

"Since that, there has always been a spectre hovering over me. It was too late to tell him then. It would have ruined his life and career.

"I realized that my punishment was to be that I must bear my burden alone. How I have longed to throw myself into his arms and tell him, but I could not. When I have ap-

peared the happiest I have been remembering." She was sobbing now.

"You have no right to condemn yourself," I said earnestly. "I don't know of anybody who has done the good you have." The papers were always full of her activities in the church and in social service work.

"I have felt I could not do enough to relieve the pain and sorrow of the world," she replied. "I have suffered so myself, that I want to make everybody else happy. If you only knew the relief it is to share this with somebody. I love my husband. Only God knows how I love him; but I think I have been the loneliest woman in the world."

She was so wrought up I made her rest a little.

Then she went on and told me how, when she had attempted to befriend a woman who had erred, Hubert had been horrified.

When she had argued with him and quoted his own Magdalene sermon, he had stormed, "Leave such work to others. It is not for my young, beautiful wife to come into contact with such people."

Her face was drawn, but I knew that to stop now would be the worst possible thing for her.

"Every time he had preached the Magdalene sermon, which he does often by request, I have writhed, realizing how little he really senses the beautiful things he says, and that he would almost die of shame if he knew his wife might be classed with the Magdalenes.

"I have never felt really bad, Miss Blake, for it was a natural mistake for a motherless, unguided, unwatched-over girl to make, but I have felt hypocritical. Oh, if I could only tell him!" The tears rolled down her face.

"I wish I could tell every girl in the world that she must keep herself inviolate; not so much for her soul's salvation, for God is understanding and forgiving; but because if she does make a mistake, as I did, she will pay and *pay* and PAY!

Every waking minute she will pay, and her dreams will be haunted.

"God forgave me long ago, but my husband, if he knew, would never forgive. That is why I am glad I am going to die."

The door must have opened slightly when I heard that creaking; must have been open ever since. Seeing a look of horror on my patient's face, I looked around, and there stood a tall man with face dead white, and eyes blazing.

"Helen! Helen!" he cried. "Not you? Never my own beautiful wife. Tell me it isn't true!"

"Hubert!" There was longing, love, motherliness and heartbreak in her tone, and she stretched out her arms.

"I never want to see you again," he answered scornfully and scathingly, and rushed from the room.

It was all over in an instant. Before I could reach my patient's side she was in a dead faint. I called to a nurse in the hall to phone for Dr. Earle.

But she soon came out of her coma, and the terrible collapse we feared didn't come. Some strange power seemed to uphold her. Maybe it was the unburdening that did it. Anyhow, she got well.

"I'm glad Hubert knows," she told me sadly the day she left the hospital. "He'll never forgive, but I'm glad he knows."

We had not heard a thing from him in the three weeks since he had flung out of the room. She told me, that as she had an income of her own, she intended going to New York, and devoting herself to helping unfortunate girls. She was calm and brave, but her face was so sad it broke my heart.

"I didn't want to live, but God must have work for me to do," was the way she summed it all up.

The papers came out with a big story of how the noted divine was suffering from overwork and had been granted

a leave of absence for travel and recuperation, that his beautiful wife was recovering from a serious operation in a sanatorium in the Catskills, and would join her husband in Europe later. But through Dr. Earle, I knew that Dr. Johnston had disappeared, and a nation-wide search was being carried on quietly.

Mrs. Johnston wrote me frequently, and twice she sent for me to come to her, saying she must have someone she could talk to. I found her busy and working like a fiend, but her eyes had a stricken look, and I knew she was grieving for her husband.

"The miserable hypocrite," I raged, every time I thought of him.

Nearly a year after he disappeared, Dr. Earle phoned me one night to come to Mercy. When I got there and found that my new case was the missing man nothing but years of severe discipline in medical work and an overwhelming love for my profession kept me from walking out, and telling Dr. Earle to get another nurse. I felt I'd rather choke "Johnny" Johnston than nurse him. Who was he to judge his sweet, wonderful wife, whose shoes he wasn't fit even to clean?

But so strong is habit, I found myself working over him as hard as I could, and wondering where he had been and what had happened to put him in such a state.

He had a high fever and was delirious. He constantly called, "Helen! Helen! Come back, Helen! I, too, have sinned. I was wrong! Helen, come back!"

"I wish we could find her," Dr. Earle worried. "Nobody seems to know where she is, and he'll die if we don't get her. He may, anyway; but there's a chance that her presence would soothe him."

I had a fight with myself, but it ended in my telling the doctor I could reach her, and in sending a telegram. The last time I had seen her I felt she was finding peace in her

work, and I knew she would ultimately be happy away from him, but was I a god to say whether or not a man should live, when one thing alone might save him? No!

Ten years of taking care of sick human beings had taught me a good many things, and among them the fact that, while a man may love a woman who has broken the Seventh Commandment, he never forgets or really forgives. And I knew, if Helen Johnston came and her husband got well, life wouldn't be any too easy for her afterwards.

She arrived on the first train, and her being there seemed to quiet him, although for days he didn't recognize anyone.

I meant to get Dr. Earle to relieve me before the patient became conscious, but it was hard to get away from Mrs. Johnston; she clung to me so.

One morning I was planning how to get off the case, on a plea of fatigue, when Dr. Johnston startled us by saying, rationally:

"Can you ever forgive me, Helen? I was wrong, but I've been through torture to pay for it."

"If you can forgive," she answered tenderly, putting her arms around him.

I bolted out of the room and phoned Dr. Earle I was all done up; that the patient was conscious and out of danger, and that I was leaving.

That was two years ago. The popular Dr. Johnston is still preaching to large audiences. People say he is more tender, and his sermons are more touching than ever. I sometimes see his beautiful wife, although I have always avoided going to her home, much to her disappointment. She tells me she is happy, but there's a wistful look in her eyes, and I know she is still paying. Men can't forget when it's a woman that has sinned.

That's why I never married, and never will. For, you see, when I was fifteen, I was one of Johnny's sweethearts.

VI

Willing Lips

THE kingdom of love—the phrase had haunted me through my girlhood. Never was a girl more romantic than I—never was there one who longed more poignantly for a life with the right man. I use the word "poignantly" advisedly, for I knew that the kingdom of love would not be mine.

I often read—I had no chance of finding out the real things of life first-hand—that girls chafed at poverty, that they believed themselves cheated of much because they had to arise at the command of an alarm clock and go forth icy mornings to work. Yet it seemed to me that there were much worse troubles than those. I used to drop my magazine and stare out into the courtyard wishing—wishing with my whole soul that I could change places with one of those lovely little Americans who went out each day in search of adventure. To slip into an alluring frock with sheer white collar and cuffs, to pull down a plain but becoming hat of velure over unruly curls, and to hang breathlessly, gayly, to a strap on the way down town in that amusing city of theirs which sits smilingly on the edge of the lake—ah, that was indeed life. How I longed to be permitted a taste of its delicious freedom!

Perhaps you have already guessed—I was not as other girls. I had to be accompanied, chaperoned, guarded incessantly. The frolics of youth lose zest when one must wear a mantle of royal dignity while playing. Yes, I was a princess and my priceless jewels failed to please me. I used to dream of forbidden shopping trips—alone—when I'd

mingle with the jostling crowds and be pushed aside by bargain-seeking hands, perhaps be answered saucily by the little shopgirls whom I envied. Always, however, I'd push aside my futile dreams to be dressed for some court function where I would wearily regard the fat, selfish faces of the retinue that fawn on royalty. I sometimes speculated upon the uproar there would be if I should suddenly speak with frankness.

Probably all this rebellion at formality prepared me in a way for what happened. My soul had sickened at the plans made to marry me off suitably. I felt that I was a mere chattel in the slave market whenever I was informed of the visit of some royal man who had come, ostensibly, to pay his respects but really to look me over and note my good points and, alas, my defects. My world-famous pearls seemed to me to be sorrowful chains binding me to the golden chair while my tentative master strolled about me making his decision.

Think, girls of the liberty land, I had never in my life been out alone until the day I met my lover, never once.

We were visiting in Buffalo, my royal aunt and I, and I had been feasted and toasted most pleasantly. During the drive through the city my Aunt Trina had whispered news that left me cold with a dreary indifference. There was a certain prince who had been approached by the prime minister of Montevinia. If Prince Peter married me the prosperity of Montevinia was assured; if not, my prospective kingdom would be endangered, as the mart of royal suitors was curiously empty.

"Can you believe it?" Aunt Trina's furious whisper assailed my ears a second time as we were on a train bound for an important suburb. "He has managed to get out of the visit arranged for him. As good as refusing to consider you. It's my belief that he is in love with a common girl. The only other suitable man is——"

I shuddered and turned my head away. I couldn't bear to have her name that man—old, ugly, and cruel, with the whispers of old amours tarnishing whatever dignity his royal birth might be supposed to give him.

I didn't have to hear the detested name again, for, at that instant, the train which was just pulling out of the station was struck. I can remember laughing hysterically at the thought that not even the royal emblems and flags decorating our private car had saved us from the runaway freight that bumped our pampered heads ruthlessly against the seats.

The ladies in waiting clustered about us chattering, deploring, weeping. I had a sudden inspiration and, ducking swiftly and creeping along the aisle, I managed to get to the door and out of the car before Aunt Trina had recovered her breath. Aunt is stout and easily upset. I'd steal a few hours.

I made my way quietly toward a trolley car. I was curiously excited, my breath came in little gasps of anticipation and my heart thumped in a manner not considered truly royal.

As I hesitated a moment I saw Aunt Trina in the distance gesturing wildly and I knew she had missed me. Taking a card from my hand bag I wrote: "Don't worry, Auntie, I've gone adventuring. It may be my only chance and I'm taking it. I suggest that you say nothing about it, though. You'll know how to manage with diplomacy!" I grinned here, as she used that word many times daily. I felt sure that she'd cover my absence with some good excuse, for my escapade would cause her trouble if it became known. Chaperoning a princess has its drawbacks.

I nodded to an urchin who stood on the corner and gave him my note and a dollar, saying:

"As soon as the car starts, hand this note to that lady who is crying." I carefully pointed out Aunt Trina.

"Yer on," he answered knowingly, winking at me in a manner I found infinitely interesting. "Goin' to meet yer sweetie?"

I returned his smile, entered a street car, and sat back a bit from the window. Aunt Trina was farsighted and might catch a glimpse of me too soon.

I had entered the car while the motorman was staring at the wrecked train and I knew nothing of the method of payment in America.

The car started with a jolt that surprised me and, as I clutched at the seat to steady myself, the motorman turned and yelled, "Come back here and pay your fare, girlie, just like everyone else."

I stared. It was I he was addressing. Did he suspect that I was——

"Takes a pretty one to try and get away with murder," he said to a lounger beside him. "Thought I wouldn't call her just because she has a pretty face. Step up here!" he added to me.

With cheeks blazing I made my unsteady way to the front, meeting a pair of amused dark eyes as a man helped me in the vestibule. For an instant I stared up at him. There was something in his face that called to my heart—a thrillingly joyous something that wrapped me in a happy dream. I put my hand up, bewildered, and then smiled. It was spontaneous, through no desire of my own. A strange emotion bubbled within me and made me smile. I couldn't help it. He, this stranger standing sedately in a trolley car, gravely assisting me to keep my footing, was the man I had longed for all my life. *He* was the master of the kingdom of love—but—the kingdom that I, by reason of my birth, could never enter.

The car bumped over a crossing and the jolt brought me back to earth. Stumbling on, I opened my purse and pulled out a bill which I tendered the motorman.

"Don't you want your change?" he called as I turned away. "You must think you belong to that party back there."

I waited silently while he thrust an incredible amount of silver into my white-gloved hand. Evidently it cost little to travel by trolley.

The car filled rapidly and I saw that the other half of the seat I was in would soon be taken. I cast an imploring glance at the dark-eyed man and he immediately joined me.

"I feared—that is, I—" I faltered.

"I understand," he answered gravely. "We are not such strangers to each other as the others," he said with a dignity that sat oddly on his young and beautiful face. Somehow, I had always associated dignity with either age or courtiers.

Courtiers—the thought sent my wits wandering again. How sick I was of the fawning flatteries uttered daily and hourly by insincere place seekers.

"Thank you. Shall we pretend we know each other? I—" I caught my breath. Again the glory of his eyes sent a rush of color to my very eyelids. "I have just this one day," I went on with an effort at coolness. "I want to make the very most of it."

He nodded. "We'll pass over the preliminaries, then," he agreed. "What shall I call you?"

I have always loved the sound of the name Mary, probably because of its uncompromising plainness. I, with a string of pompous names to my credit, preferred Mary.

"Mary is a beautiful name," he answered. "Jack is mine, Jack Jones—common, I grant you, but a name easily remembered."

That was the beginning of my day of days.

During Aunt Trina's and my visit to Buffalo the skies had been overcast and gray, but now the goddess of the weather recognized first love and made the sun return. Golden and blue and glorious was that day we spent alone.

I do not know now the places at which we stopped. We ate at a candle-lighted table and we sped north in a swift taxicab. We wandered through a park that was veiled in crisp snow and fed the squirrels from a paper bag holding peanuts. How wonderful it seemed to me to be freed from the scrutiny of my ladies. There were no covert smiles hidden behind fans when I looked at Jack, no whispers of amused comment at my youthful betrayal of emotion. For I no longer tried to fool myself. I loved Jack.

We had strolled past the conservatory in the park when I saw him gesture toward a group of three men who loitered near. For the first time since my escape from Aunt Trina a pang of fear touched me. I recalled now that those three well-dressed men had been a part of the scenery all day, and it was now twilight. Did they intend— My throat grew dry and I had to lick my lips before I managed to whisper:

"Jack, why do they follow us? Do they know that I—" I broke off, trembling.

He bent toward me. "It's all right, little Mary, don't you trust me?"

I nodded dumbly, but my fear increased. Then his frank smile somewhat disarmed me, as he said, "I shall take care of you, Mary. Those fellows are friends of mine. I'd promised to spend the day with them here in Buffalo and they are dogging us for sheer devilment. They think they'll tire us out. Don't appear to notice them. They—" his gay laughter rang out youthfully— "must have spent a sum in taxicabs alone, following us about, trying to spoil our day of——"

I caught my breath again. Did he read my mind? Would he say "our day of days?"

The finish of his sentence was the word "love."

"Day of love?" I heard this strange, new Mary repeating shamelessly, my eyes meeting his, radiantly. "Then you—" I bit off the betraying word.

"Then I love you and you love me, no use to pretend otherwise, sweetheart. I've learned a lot to-day, but the most glorious lesson has been the reading of your soul. Shall we be married very soon, Mary? I have a friend in the city hall, and if I telephone him he will stay late enough for us to get the license, and we can be——"

I stared up through the gathering dusk with miserable eyes. His arms were around me now. We stood in the friendly shelter of some shrubbery and above his shoulder I saw the cool slim curve of the rising moon.

He held me closer, his head bent down to mine. "Kiss me, little one," he said urgently, "my little love!"

I dismissed my recollection of what stood gauntly between our hearts. The throne itself should not prevent the kiss I longed for with an undisciplined heart.

Our lips met. Better than the joy of the glance of those dark eyes was that kiss. Breathless, limp with happiness, I lay in his arms while he whispered the words I gloried in hearing.

"I must go and telephone to Fred," he murmured at last, gradually releasing me, bending again to take a last toll from my willing lips.

Then I told him the truth. My life was not my own—it belonged to the throne that would be mine shortly. My people must be considered when I married, and gently I whispered this last—that the princess could not marry Jack Jones, commoner.

He stood, his head a little bowed, his hand slowly dropping mine. The silence was broken only by the muffled roar of the city which came incessantly into that snow garden that seemed peopled only by the forms of granite or bronze on their eternal pedestals of bygone glory.

"You are the princess," he said at last, "destined for Ludwig, famous libertine."

I sobbed, "It is my lot. My people——"

"Bah! Balderdash. Royalty means nothing. My little Mary tied to that old man! It's hideous. You won't marry me?"

"I cannot," I sobbed, and it seemed to me that the rising wind took my whisper and screamed it above the frozen paths of the park that had been as a land of enchantment but a short time before. That was when I had forgotten that I was other than Mary, plain little American in a joy-land of personal liberty.

"You, with your innocent beauty, to be thrust into the arms of that old reprobate," Jack raged. "It isn't decent. Mary—I shall call you by the name I love—royalty often winks at conventions. There are many alliances made that are apart from the pomp of the court. We are only puppets—caught in the net of love. Take me—as many of your fellow-princesses have taken commoners. Let us enjoy our youth while we may. If—later—the good of your country demands the sacrifice—accept this Ludwig."

I drew away and looked at him. Although my heart flowed out toward him almost overwhelmingly, something made me pause. How could he ask such a thing of me?

"Don't look like that, Mary. It's only good sense. We have just one life to live—here. Soon our joyous youth will have fled and we shall be stiff and tired. Nothing will be left for us but the memory of what might have been."

I shivered. I could see myself, a tired, shaky little old woman—ever regretting that gay bubble of joy she had refused. Youth needs youth—an aged husband awaited me indifferently. At least, I shuddered involuntarily, I *hoped* he waited with indifference.

Yet—there was honor. I clenched my hands while agony bit into my heart. To keep honor I must give up the love that had blossomed so strangely in that moment of meeting. It was as though life had touched the drab ashes of monotonous routine and the dust had flowered into rosy hope. In

the chill of the wind that now blew in icy blasts from the lake across the Drive, honor seemed a dreary companion.

"You agree?" Jack's voice was tinged with something I could not understand. Was it mockery that lurked beneath his query, or amusement at the hesitation that gripped me? "A few royal marriages are sincere," he went on, "but in the majority of cases, after the duty to the state has been fulfilled, the individual is free to please herself. Did you like that younger man your aunt favored, Mary?"

I crimsoned with rage. So, even in America, the royal matchmaker's maneuvers were known. The gay young prince had no mind to be drawn into the web of a marriage of convenience. To him it mattered little where he married, but to me it did. The kingdom of Montevinia needed——

"Well?" the odd, different note still lingered in his voice.

"I—I never met him," I acknowledged. "He did not accept the invitation to visit Montevinia and——"

"Be presented to the beautiful young princess," he finished, as I hesitated. "You are indeed very lovely, Mary. Lovely enough for a story-book princess. I—will you accompany me now? To-morrow you can go back to your Aunt Trina and make your peace."

How well he knew her name. He seemed conversant with many trifles that I should not have supposed would interest him.

I still hesitated.

Again his arms were about me and our lips met. "You cannot refuse, can you, Mary?" he asked.

I did not answer, for I could not refuse.

We dined in a great hotel on the lake's edge. I watched the happy faces of the young girls who ate and danced and flirted with the supreme poise of the daughters of America. Somehow the food no longer tempted me. I felt that fate had given me a mean rôle in the painted scene of life. Why could I not marry and live in happy obscurity? I couldn't.

Lifting my head haughtily I thrust back my misgivings and decided to drink deeply of my cup of pleasure.

I went in search of a maid, a little later, to repair a rent in my gown, leaving Jack at the table watching the dancers.

As I stood restlessly waiting for the nimble fingers to finish the slight repair, a sudden memory of my childhood thrust itself into my mind. I was a guest at a party and, through a miscalculation, the gifts were one short. I was clutching an extremely lovely wax doll when my father touched my shoulder.

"That little girl there was an unexpected guest and she received no doll. Wouldn't you like to give her yours?"

"No," I cried indignantly, "I would *not*. I love my doll, already."

He looked grieved.

"Why should I? Am I not a princess? Let some common person give up hers." My eyes swept the room proudly. "There are a number here who have no title."

"And that, child, is the reason *you* should. Royalty must often give up the beloved object—often something much more important than a doll. Do it to please me and, later in life, you will have formed the habit of thinking of others. Our lives are not our own. They belong to our people."

Odd how memories flash back over the years. I obliged my father because I loved him. Now, at maturity, I realized that there had been a deeper meaning beneath his casual words than I, as a child, had sensed. There had been a girl he loved, born outside the glitter of the court, but my father had refused to form the morganatic marriage which she was willing to make. Instead, he had furthered her marriage to a former sweetheart, and had then returned to his queen.

"With only honor to comfort him," I murmured.

The maid arose from her knees and exclaimed over the

tip I dropped in her hand: "Honor is a word I seldom hear, miss," she answered, bewildered.

"It is a beautiful word, though," I said dully. My heart had died in my bosom and I was trying to hold fast to the vision of my father's eyes as I remembered them.

For the second time on my day of days I wrote a brief note:

"I'm sorry, Jack, I can't.

"'I could not love thee, dear, so much, lov'd I not honour more.'"

Tears blinded me as I folded the note and gave it to the maid. Then, with a vivid picture of the upright figure and dark eyes of my lover, who awaited me confidently, I left and hurried back to the royal suite at the hotel.

I brushed aside my aunt's whispered words of wrath and happy exclamations of relief at my return and rushed to my own room to weep.

My ladies waited there to dress me for the great ball I had forgotten. Mutinously I sat while they decked me out in silks and feathers. How I hated the whole thing. I wanted to be Jack's wife and live in one of the little bungalows I'd seen from the train on our way across New York state. I gave myself up to reverie. I pictured myself adding a bowl of winter roses to a table set for two, and a sob struggled up as I also visioned a tiny head with clustering curls at my side.

. . . . . .

"My dear, look!" Aunt Trina stared across the glittering ballroom with incredulous pleasure. "He is coming toward us—I did not even know he was in America. Look, child, there he is with his three——"

Indifferently I glanced across the banked flowers near a

doorway as my aunt replied to a question already twice asked:

"It's Prince John Peter——"

I did not hear the rest of the excited sentence for Jack was bowing before me. If he had been wonderful in his plain street clothes he now resembled a young god, at least to me. After one swift look into his radiantly smiling eyes, my own dropped to the decoration on his lapel.

Beside him were the three men who had trailed us all day.

"My little princess—Mary—" he whispered almost inaudibly, "I knew what your answer would be. But, Mary, don't you see, I had to be very sure of the girl I made my wife. I've heard rumors that I now have proved to be false.

"'Lov'd I not honour more,'" he quoted, as I put my hand on his arm and moved quietly away with him, neither of us having heard a word of the presentation.

VII

Vanity's Price

HEN I went off one afternoon and was married to Percy Milton by the justice of the peace, everybody in Huntertown said I'd certainly made an awfully poor match. Percy and I had both grown up in Huntertown and I'd known him ever since he used to bring in the vegetables off his father's huckster wagon. Percy didn't like truck gardening—too long hours, he said—so he took one of those correspondence school courses at the same time I was going to high school.

There was only one garage in Huntertown. It belonged to Papa's brother and when Percy went to him for work and showed him the diploma from the correspondence school, Uncle Mark just gave a snort and said he wouldn't have anyone standing around with a book in one hand and a tire wrench in the other, learning how to change a tire.

So Percy went off to Milwaukee, which is only a short distance away, and finally got a job as car washer in the service department of the Weber Car Company. He came home over Sunday once in a while and told me it was awful lonesome in Milwaukee. We thought two could live as cheap as one, so one afternoon when he seemed awful discouraged, we just went off to old Justice Milheim's and got married.

Mamma and Papa felt terrible, but Mamma helped me pack a suitcase and said she'd send my trunk. And we all went down to the evening train together and stood on the platform, not saying a word, we were so afraid we'd begin to cry.

But it wasn't so bad in Milwaukee. Percy knew of some nice rooms for light housekeeping—just one room that looked out on a city playground. There was a folding bed and a sort of little alcove with a gas plate, and some open shelves for dishes. We didn't have much money for movies, but we were so close down town that we could have a good time by walking past the windows of the big stores in the evenings and picking out the things we'd like to buy if we had the money.

It wasn't very long before we were talking about the things we'd buy for the baby if we had the money, English baby carriages and those little cradle things all hung with fine dotted net over blue satin. I made a few things for the baby, but they couldn't be very fancy on the money that Percy got.

One evening in the fall, Percy came home a little later than usual. It was one of those late, hot days when the dust and the heat seem to play you out so. Percy took off his coat and unbuttoned his collar, and sat down by the window and looked out at the dusty playground. The children had all gone home for their suppers, and it was real still except for the sparrows that always make such a fuss around that time in the evening.

Percy sat and looked out at the swings and the wading pool without saying anything. I got out the little stand we used to eat on, and put on the two plates and glasses.

"I met Mr. Brinker down at the corner as I came home," Percy said after a while.

Mr. Brinker owned one of the big groceries in town. (I didn't trade there—their things were too high.) Before Percy went with the Weber Company, he had driven one of the Brinker wagons while one of the drivers was sick.

"He wanted me to drive for him again," Percy went on. "Just another temporary place while one of the drivers is away.

"I'm working for the Weber Company, car washing," I said.

"And then he asked, 'Do you ever do any work in the evening? We need a good car washer the worst way—that fellow Arnold's always drunk. But, of course, you'd have to wash the cars at night, so's they'd be ready for the day deliveries.' "

"Oh, Percy," I interrupted, "don't even think of trying it. It's such hard work standing in cold water all day. You come home so dog-tired anyway. You'd have to work till all hours, wouldn't you?"

"Well, they're running fifteen cars this summer. I couldn't get through before eleven o'clock or later."

He sat there a few minutes without saying anything while I cut the bread for supper. It was awful hot—not a bit of breeze. I went over to him and gave him the *Huntertown Gazette* that Papa always sends on to me after he's read it. But Percy didn't read it—just fanned himself with it, sitting there with his eyes shut, and his head leaned against the window frame.

After a while he said, "Ada, I think we ought to save up a little extra money for the baby. He might need it sometime. It takes just about all I can earn to keep us, and I'll have to give the doctor something. I hope he won't charge us much."

He stopped again and then kind of sighed.

"I think I better take Mr. Brinker's offer," he said.

"Percy, I'd be all alone every evening," I said, and began to cry. I never had gotten used to being alone so much. Mamma and I always did lots of talking. I used to save things all day long to tell Percy in the evening.

But Percy's real set in his ways for anyone as kind as he is.

"I'll tell you what let's do," he said. "We'll start a sinking fund! We'll keep this outside money I earn all by itself,

and when I'm away in the evening you can have a nice time figuring what the compound interest will be by the time the baby votes."

He kept on talking and arguing till I gave in. Then we sat down and ate our supper that had got all cold. After supper was over, we got a big envelope and Percy wrote on it in ink, "Percy Wells Milton's First National Bank." (We were going to name the baby after Percy and Papa.)

"We'll keep just the Brinker money in here," Percy said.

The next evening Percy ate his supper in a hurry, and went off to the big garage behind the store where the delivery wagons for "The Brinker and Sons Grocery Company" were kept. I washed the dishes and sewed a little while on the baby's things while I waited for Percy to come home.

I was sick and miserable that fall, and every once in a while I'd stop, and put my head down on the table and rest.

All at once I woke up. Somebody had hold of my shoulder and was shaking me. It was Percy, and I was so dazed I couldn't remember why I was there in the middle of the night, all dressed, or where Percy had been.

"Ada, you mustn't try to wait up for me," Percy was saying. "I can't bear to go to work at night, if I have to think of you here, trying to keep awake till I come home."

He made me promise. So, after that, I'd lie down with my clothes on when I got my evening work done. I got so I could wake right up when I heard Percy's key in the lock.

I tried to always have hot water ready because his hands were so numb. I had to almost undress him, his feet were so swollen from wearing rubber boots all day long. In the winter, it was harder to clean the frozen mud off the cars and took longer. Around Christmas time, he came home later and later.

"Percy, you *can't* work day and night, both. Tell Mr. Brinker you'll have to give it up," I begged.

"I can hold out till the baby comes," he'd say.

Mr. Brinker paid him every Saturday night, and we always put the money in the big envelope and counted how much it made all together.

"We'll seal it up when the baby comes," he said one Saturday night. He was so hoarse from working in the cold water, I couldn't understand what he said, and had to ask him to say it over again.

"I said we'd seal it up when the baby comes. It won't be so long now and then I'm going to stay home *every* evening with you and the baby. I bet he'll be a cute little fellow."

He put the envelope back in the top drawer of the dresser under his clothes.

"Some day, we'll be awful glad it's there," he said.

I never used a cent of that money for the gas meter, or any of the regular expenses. I couldn't wear any nice clothes myself and Percy said his suit was certainly holding out fine. He'd paid thirty-five dollars for it before we were married. It certainly goes to show it pays to get *good* clothes.

We counted the "sinking fund" every night that winter and spring.

The night before I went to the hospital there was just seventy-six dollars and eighty-nine cents, so Percy put in eleven pennies more, to make it even.

I hadn't meant to go to the hospital at all. I'd got the room all cleaned up, and even washed the windows and hung fresh curtains, and all.

The doctor was going to bring a nurse with him, and then the district nurse was to come afterward and look after me for a few days until I was able to get around again.

But the night Percy called the doctor from the corner drug store, about two o'clock in the morning, he said right away when he got there:

"We'll have to have the hospital for this job."

Percy went right back to the drug store and telephoned for the ambulance, while the doctor stayed and worked over me. I don't even remember them carrying me down the three flights of stairs on the stretcher, but Percy told me afterwards the doctor shouted to the driver:

"Step on it, and pick the smooth streets!"

The baby turned out to be a little girl, after all, and we didn't have any name for her; but we finally named her Marguerite Beryl and called her just "Baby." Percy spent all his time off at the hospital. He stayed every evening till the nurses told him visiting hours were over. I don't know whether he came most to see me or Baby.

He said to me, "Ada, I wanted a little girl all along," and he would have held her all the time if the nurses had let him.

He was just *crazy* about her. She *was* awfully sweet, and didn't look like anybody. It's a good thing he was crazy about her, and wasn't disappointed about her not being a boy because, the day I was going home, the doctor came and sat down by me. (I was out on the porch of the upper ward, and *so* excited about going home.)

"You've had a hard time, Mrs. Milton," he said, "and I don't want you to begin working too hard when you get back to the flat."

"Oh, well," I said, "I'll begin to feel stronger pretty soon, and it was worth it all to have such a sweet little daughter to take home."

"She's a fine baby," he said, "and she's strong and well. You'll have to keep her that way. Watch her and guard her because——"

He stopped and looked down at the floor a minute. Then he looked at me in that kind way of his, "—because she's the only one you'll ever have."

I didn't think so much about what he said at the time. It was all such a terrible nightmare to remember that I was

almost glad that I never would have to go through it again.

But after I got back to the flat, I used to think of how kind and earnest the doctor had looked at me out there on the porch of Ward B. I got into the habit of talking to Baby a good deal and I'd say to her, "Mind, you're a credit to your family, Baby, because you're all the family there's going to be!"

Mamma and Papa came down to see her but, of course, they had to go right back, because I was in the hospital and Percy couldn't have taken care of them at the flat, even if there'd been any room for them there.

I liked it in the hospital. There was a real pleasant lady in the bed next to me. She had eight other children at home —Mrs. Vidal, she was. And the nurses in the ward were all nice and friendly. One of them brought me a fashion book of hers to look at the pictures. I lay there and thought I'd look just like that, slim and tall and beautiful, when I got out again—if I had beautiful clothes like the ones in the book, of course. I was a real pretty girl, folks used to say in Huntertown.

One of the pictures looked just like Myra Jessup back home. One summer, Percy and I had an awful fuss because Percy said he didn't see any sense in joining every old thing that came along. I had just been taken into the Eastern Star, and had to go to lodge meeting one evening when Percy had come in from his father's farm to see me. I just *had* to go, because I was the secretary and had to read the minutes. But Percy said, "It wouldn't kill anybody if the minutes didn't get read."

We had words and, all that summer, Percy took Myra Jessup everywhere—to all the socials and everything. Myra was a real pretty girl and always had the loveliest clothes because her mother was a dressmaker. Her mother had lots of fashion books in her front room—one French one called the "Haute Monde." When I graduated from high school,

Mamma had Mrs. Jessup make me a dress out of it and Mrs. Jessup said, "I always make *all* of Myra's dresses from these designs." I hadn't thought of it for a long time till the nurse gave me her fashion book, and I saw the picture that looked just like Myra.

After I got back to the flat the hot weather came on right away, and I didn't seem to get strong. I worried a good deal about the money we'd had to spend at the hospital, though they were so nice to Percy down at the shop, and let him have some pay in advance.

But being in debt was awful hard on him, and he began to look so thin and tired that I began to worry about that, too. The baby's washing wore me out and she didn't gain as fast as I thought she ought to.

One awful hot night, the baby kept whimpering and fussing and I finally began to cry, too, because I was so tired and worn out, and all. Then Percy said:

"Why couldn't you go back to Huntertown for a little visit? One of the boys at the shop said he'd buy my radio for fifteen dollars. That would cover the railroad fare easy."

And at that I began to cry harder than ever, for Percy made his radio himself, and even if he made another it could never be the same thing to him. But he went on arguing and arguing and finally he said he thought the baby oughtn't to be in the hot city, and then I said I'd go. I decided I'd go Sunday morning. That would give time for my letter to get to Huntertown on Saturday and, besides, on Sunday morning, Percy could help me down to the station.

The next morning, after I got Percy off, I decided I'd better wash out some of my things, so they'd be all clean to take. They were all things I'd brought from Huntertown and, for the first time, they seemed awful shabby. I began to think of all the mean tongues there were in Huntertown

—old Miss Molly Easton, who lives just back of Mamma, would be over the very first thing. And Myra Jessup would come to see me right off and she'd have on something out of the "Haute Monde." I couldn't bear for even Mamma to see that I hadn't had a single new thing since I was married, except some bungalow aprons I wore before Baby came, and that were too big for me now. But I couldn't get new things.

But I went right on and washed out some things and ironed them to be ready. When I went to put them back in the drawer, I pulled out the top drawer by mistake. There, right on top, was the big envelope with "Percy Wells Milton's First National Bank" written on the outside, and seventy-seven dollars even, inside. I took it out and held it a minute.

Just then Baby began to cry. I remembered it was her feeding time. I took her up and sat down to rock her and feed her. She looked so pitiful, all splotched up with heat rash and only an ugly little plain slip on, that I took the hem of her little ugly dress to wipe away the tears that had begun to roll down my face. And when I put my hand to my face I discovered I was still holding the envelope that was our bank.

I sat there, holding the baby and the money, for a long time. Baby went to sleep and I laid her on the bed—she didn't have any bed for herself. I remembered all the hateful things Huntertown had said about Percy when we got married, and I knew already the things they'd say when I got off at the depot, wearing the same dark blue crêpe de chine that I made the time our Sunday school gave a cantata and I played the piano for the chorus. "Well, everybody told her what to expect."

I lay and thought about the money all that night.

"I want the baby to look nice for her grammaw and grampaw," I kept saying to myself, over and over, but it

wasn't the baby I thought about as much as what they'd say about Percy and me.

The next morning I waited till Percy was gone.

I waited a long time, just standing by the door and listening. I wanted to be sure Percy wasn't coming back for something he'd forgotten.

After a long time, I went over to the dresser and opened the top drawer a little. Then I stopped, for there *was* someone coming up the stairs. I shut the drawer quick and stood listening again. But it was just my heart pounding I'd heard. I opened the door. There was no one in the hall, or on the stairs.

Then I remembered I could lock the door, so I tiptoed over and turned the key. I got the envelope out and steamed it open, all the time looking fearfully about as if someone could see, although the door was locked and the shades down. Then I took out the money and hid it in my little black hand bag.

I got the scissors out of my workbasket and cut some newspaper the size of the bills—enough to make the same weight—and folded them the way the bills had been folded and put them back in the envelope. I was beginning to tremble now, because I was hurrying so—I couldn't seem to get my breath.

"I'll put in the eleven pennies to make it feel right if Percy picks it up," I whispered to myself. "I can find some way to earn it back before he finds it out."

Then I sealed the envelope up and put it back in the drawer. It looked just the same as before, and, when I lifted it, I couldn't feel any difference.

I bathed the baby and dressed her in the dress I'd made to put on "Percy Wells" when Mamma and Papa came down to see him for the first time. I carried her four blocks to a big store, and left her in the nursery they have there. Then I went down to the third floor where all the ready-

made garments were; and the baby things and the hats—and I spent all that money.

It was a good thing it was summer. For one thing, I decided I wouldn't get any coat at all; for another, summer dresses and things don't cost like winter materials. The very first thing I bought was a "breakfast coat"—I oughtn't to have done it, of course, but it was a beautiful changeable taffeta— lavender and gold—and had a fall of wide cream lace down the front. I got two silk crêpe dresses—one black, to wear on the train, and the other was the heavenliest yellow you ever did see. They were both mussy and the yellow one was soiled, too; but I knew I could freshen them up when I got to Mamma's.

The money was almost gone, but I squeezed out a little cream-colored flannel coat for baby with hand embroidery on the deep cape collar, and three little dresses (two of them had that sweet Armenian lace around the neck and wrists). And, at the last minute, I found the cutest little cap with a stand-back frill around the face that I knew would make baby look just like a little sweet pea.

I had all the things sent "special" for that same afternoon and I took them all over across the hall to Miss Ella Moore. (She's a little, old, crippled lady who stays in her room all the time.) I asked her if I could keep them there, because it was a surprise.

She thought I was going to tell Percy at the last minute, but I didn't tell him at all. I sneaked my new things into my suitcase, and wore my old blue crêpe de chine to the train. But after we'd got our seat in the day coach, and I'd waved the baby's hand up and down at Percy, and the train had begun to move out of the train shed, I went into the dressing room and put on the dress I'd bought to travel in. It wasn't nearly as fussy as the old blue dress, but I never felt so elegant in my life as when I came back and took my seat again.

I don't think I'd ever been homesick to *know* I was, but, when the brakeman called out, "Hunter*town, Hunter*town," I stood at the top of the car steps with the baby on one arm and the suitcase in the other hand—and there was Mamma on the platform, in a dark, blue-dotted swiss, and Papa getting out of the surrey, the old surrey with the yellow canopy-fringe torn off and hanging, and old bay Nellie with her blind, white eye.

I had a good time at home. Mamma had made me a lemon pie with two crusts, and I ate so much it made me sick.

And everything I'd start to do, she'd say, "Now, you go play that pretty piece you played at the recital, and let me iron the baby's clothes."

Percy wrote a postcard every day or so. He didn't have time for more. They were all just about alike:

"Dear Ada: The hot weather still holds on, though the paper says 'Showers and Cooler' for to-morrow. Glad you and baby are out of the city heat. Am working so hard I don't get time to miss you as much as if I was home more. How is baby? I bet she grows so much I won't know her. Love from Percy."

But she didn't gain at all, and seemed sort of droopy. Next to the last day I was home (I stayed nearly a month), Mamma said, "Ada, don't you think the baby sleeps a lot?"

And I remember I cut right in and said, "Yes, I'm glad she does. All little babies ought to. Mamma, could you press my yellow crêpe? I've got to hustle, or Ruth will be here before I'm ready."

And I went off to a reunion of the Dorcas Society they had for me.

All that were there asked about Percy—everybody in Huntertown did—and I just always said he was well but working awful hard.

"Mr. Westendorf, the head of the department, *depends* on Percy so," I'd say.

Myra Jessup was there, of course, and she came over and sat beside me when they served the chicken salad, hot biscuits, and coffee. Some of the coffee dripped off the bottom of the cup, and Myra ran right away to get a towel dipped in cold water to take the stain out of my yellow crêpe.

"You can leave that dress to me in your will," she said, and laughed. Then she said, in a whisper, "I wouldn't have Mother know it for *worlds,* Ada, but I'd give anything for a ready-made dress like yours. You don't know how sick I am of the things I wear out of fashion books. They all look exactly alike."

Of course I said, "Why, you always look as stylish as *can* be, Myra."

But, all at once, some way, I saw the top dresser drawer back in the flat in the city, and the lying envelope with the worthless papers and coins in it to make it feel heavy, in case Percy happened to pick it up.

That evening, when I got back to Mamma's, I saw right away the baby was sick.

"I must get her back to Percy," I kept saying although Mamma and Papa thought I'd better stay. But there are better doctors in a city and I went back the next day just as I'd planned.

Nobody on the train knew baby was sick. They just thought she was asleep. I laid her on the seat and people, going up and down the aisle, would stop and look at her. I had put on her embroidered coat and had her little frilled cap on to keep her head from rubbing on the stiff plush of the seat. One lady, about Mamma's age, stopped and leaned over her.

"I wish she'd wake up," she said, "so's I could see her eyes."

But she didn't wake up. She just slept on.

By the time I got her to the flat, she was in a deep stupor and the twitches had got to be hard jerks.

The doctor was a nice man—you could see he was sorry for us.

"I'm afraid the baby has encephalitis," he said. (I know that's the word. He wrote it for me afterwards.) "What you would call 'sleeping sickness.' We don't know much about it yet but, if you could get her to Chicago there's a man there who knows more about it than anyone else."

"Couldn't we take her to the hospital where I went when she was born?" I begged. "They saved *my* life there. Everybody says it's a fine hospital."

"Yes, you could," he replied, "but we've lost nearly all the cases of sleeping sickness we've had there. This man in Chicago has something new. One of our doctors has gone on there to study with him. You better try to get the baby to Chicago, if you can manage it. I believe it's your only chance."

Percy had been standing all this time looking down at baby. He cleared his throat and looked at the doctor and I saw the tears running down his face.

"Well, doctor," he said, and then had to stop. After a minute, he began again.

"We won't give up as long as she's alive," he said. "We've got a little money saved up—enough to take us to this wonderful doctor, if he'll treat her free. How much is in that envelope, Ada?"

I was kneeling down beside the bed with the baby's hand against my cheek. I had forgotten all about the money. I couldn't think of anything but baby. I got up and looked at him.

"The *money* in the envelope," he repeated. "Is there enough for the tickets?"

He went over to the dresser and put his hand on the knob of the drawer.

"Percy!" I shrieked.

I tried to get to him, but I was on the far side of the bed, and before I could get past the doctor he had got the envelope out and ripped it open. He turned it upside down but only the eleven pennies fell out in his hand—the ones Percy had put in the night before I went to the hospital. Then he pulled out the pieces of newspaper, cut the size of bills.

"What does this mean?" he shouted at me, holding out the pieces of paper. "Where's the baby's money?"

"Oh, Percy," I sobbed. "Listen to me—" I tried to catch his hand, but he jerked away from me.

"Where is it? What have you done with it?" he shouted again. "You tell me where that money is!" he snarled.

I fell on my knees and grasped his tense arm.

"Oh, Percy!" I said brokenly, "I spent the money—*all* of it—for *clothes.*"

There's something about a hospital that takes all your hope away. The lights in the long halls shine on the varnished linoleum, and the nurses slip by with their starched skirts rustling.

The morning baby died, one of the nurses came to me out in the big upper hall.

"We've telephoned for your husband," she said. "Would you like to see your baby again?" She looked at me so kindly. She made me think of Mamma a little.

My lips were shaking. I put the back of my hand up against them a minute.

"Would she know me again? Will she come to?" I couldn't believe it was my voice. It was just a little ragged whisper.

"No. There's no chance for that, but you may see her if you wish."

I just shook my head. She took me into a room that wasn't being used. There was an iron baby bed in there—

blue-and-white flowered ticking on the mattress and a piece of rubber sheeting folded and hung on the bed rail. I sat there in a low rocker, and looked at the empty bed.

My hands had begun to shake. I got my purse open and took out my handkerchief and wiped the palms, they were so wet and cold. My lips had begun to tremble, and I kept trying to hold them steady with my finger tips.

I wonder if Percy's come. He must be in there with baby now, I kept thinking.

I don't know how long I sat there. All of a sudden I heard the door latch click. I stood up.

Percy opened the door. His hair was down over his eyes and his face was all red and swollen. He didn't have to tell me baby was gone. He looked at me with his eyes half-shut and then he shouted, all in one gasp:

"Well, you've got a fine, new black dress to wear to the funeral."

He dropped into the little low chair and leaned his head against the blue-and-white flowered mattress and sobbed.

I sent my yellow crêpe and my breakfast coat to Myra. She wrote me an awful sweet letter. I still have it—it's in a little white box with the little, frilled cap baby had.

I kept my black dress. It is my robe of penance. Whenever I wear it, I hear again the only cruel words Percy ever said to me. My vanity cost my baby's life, and I shall go to the end of my days dressed in mourning.

VIII

Locked Doors

IT SEEMS ages ago that I came to Brighton Manor as a bride. So many things have happened since then. The trees were in bloom, and great masses of apple blossoms fluttered down like little white butterflies as we drove slowly and joyously up the lane. Never, I know, was a bride so blissfully happy as I, nor a bridegroom so wonderful as Cam.

We had spent two radiant months of honeymooning, wandering hither and yon—forgetful of time and of everything in the world except that we loved each other. Cam was always such a dear, thoughtful sweetheart and so very devoted.

When our car drove up before the door of the old-fashioned Manor Cam whispered, "Shut your eyes, darlingest! Don't open them until I give the word."

I obeyed delightedly. I felt myself picked up in his arms and carried gently up the steps, then through the door and deposited on a low stool. "Now look," he whispered.

I opened my eyes and could scarcely credit my senses. The room was beautiful—old mahogany and quaint chintzes, every item of the furnishings blended so well, that I caught at once a picture of a perfect ensemble. It was only by a more careful study of the room that I noted the high lights accentuated in a quaint vase, a pair of burnished brass candelabra, a crystal mirror. I sat there enthralled, enjoying the happiness of it.

"Well, how do you like your new home?" asked Cam.

"Oh, Cam dear, it's perfect! How could your mother

have endured moving out so that we could live here?" Mother Brighton had moved to a smaller house and had given Brighton Manor to Cam and me for our home.

"Mother's a brick," Cam told me as I nestled into his arms.

After lunch we made a trip through the house. Each room seemed more perfect and lovely than the last, and while I had been reared in a home of refinement and wealth, I had never known that such splendor existed outside of motion pictures I had seen—or fairy stories.

There was only one incident to mar my day. I am, I suppose, most awfully human, and have an innate curiosity. At the end of the huge hall at the head of the stairs there was a door. "Oh, Cam," I cried, "there's one room you didn't show me."

"Not now," he said.

I went to the door and found it locked. At first I thought he was teasing me. I restrained my curiosity as well as I could until the next day; then I again asked Cam if we were not going to inspect the locked room, but he playfully pinched my ear.

Weeks passed and still the door to that room had never been opened.

Cam's group of friends had accepted me as one of their circle, and I was very happy. His mother, too, treated me like a daughter and I loved her devotedly. In fact, I was extremely happy except for the mystery of that locked room. Often I stood in the garden, intently trying to penetrate the secret which it hid.

"Is that room haunted?" I asked Cam one day.

"Oh, sweetness," he chided, kissing me tenderly, "wait until you grow up; then you'll know. You're too much of a baby yet to be trusted with such a big problem."

"But Cam, I'm not a baby—just because I've got big, blue eyes and fluffy hair."

"Violet eyes," he said lovingly.

"You do love me, Cam?"

"More than all the world, sweetheart."

"Then tell me," I pouted, but Cam only snuggled me closer. "Is it anything terrible?"

"Oh, sweetness, you don't think I'm a Bluebeard, do you, and that I've cut off all my other wives' heads and hung them in that room?

"Tell you though, honey," he said teasingly, "I'd behead a hundred other wives for you."

The idea was absurd, and yet I must admit that, subconsciously, I *had* included a Bluebeard's closet as one of the numberless possibilities which I had mentally conjured.

At last I could stand it no longer. I determined to find out for myself what lay behind the door of that mystery room. With great care and secrecy I secured a number of keys of every conceivable shape and combination. Had I known more of the mechanism of locks I need not have purchased so many; but I am not of a mechanical turn of mind, and never before had I had need of a knowledge of such absurd devices as locks to mysterious rooms.

I laid my plans carefully, as I did not wish anyone to know that I was so absurdly curious as to stoop to the act of prying into something which did not concern me.

But wasn't it my concern, I argued, trying to convince myself that I was justified in what I had determined to do

Cam was usually at the office all day, so I did not fear his return, and I gave the servants the day off. I thought they would never leave, but at last I was alone.

The big clock on the stairs ticked off the seconds as I stood before the locked door. I tried key after key in the lock. Some of them turned over so slightly; some not at all. One or two opened it—almost. I had but three keys left. I closed my eyes and selected one at random. It turned easily! The door was at last unlocked!

I stood there, shaking from head to foot, too limp to turn the knob and come face to face with the mystery. The grandfather's clock struck the half hour—a breeze rustled the draperies at the window—a vine brushed swishingly on the stone wall—a bird sang a gay snatch of song in a near-by tree and the yellow canary from his cage answered merrily.

My heart raced, the blood pounding in my ears like the throb of the ocean on desolate shores. My breath came harshly, and a lump in my throat seemed as if it were choking me.

A great fear overwhelmed me. Here before me lay the solution, and I was too overcome to turn the knob and know the truth about the thing which had mystified me for more than a year.

I lacked the courage and started to turn the key and thus lock the door again, but with the physical effort of relocking the door came a return to normalcy and my curiosity once more asserted itself. Resolutely, I squared my shoulders and opened the door. The room was absolutely empty! It was a greater shock than if I had found it filled with horrible ogres or something equally depressing.

With difficulty I walked into the room, and found that a smaller one opened out of it.

"Ah," I said, "here lies the mystery!" I was now no longer afraid, feeling sure that through this next door lay the secret! I opened the door quickly, eagerly. And it, too, was empty! I closed my eyes, trying to sense the atmosphere of the room. I could get nothing but a sense of happiness and joy.

"No, this room is not haunted," I said to myself. A careful survey of the cream-tinted walls failed to reveal a possibility of even a hidden panel. More mystified than ever, I closed the door and locked it.

The many keys presented a new difficulty. Where could

I dispose of them? I did not wish them to be found as a mute testimony of my overpowering curiosity. I walked down through the garden, but could find no place to hide them. A short walk brought me to a cliff that overhung the ocean, and with a relieved sigh I consigned them to a watery grave.

Fall came with its blaze of gay colors and passed into the glistening iridescence of winter.

Cam's mother became very ill and Cam and I were constantly at her bedside. Many times I found her watching me intently, and often she shot a questioning look at Cam. Then one day, when she was worse than usual, she asked me if I would leave her alone with Cam as she wished to have a long talk with him.

I was glad of a little freedom after the confining closeness of the sick room, and I went for a long walk. When I returned, Cam's mother seemed in better spirits, and he greeted me with a new tenderness.

Mother Brighton took a turn for the better and recovered very rapidly, so Cam and I went for a delightful holiday to Florida.

We idled in the warm air and the balmy sunshine, and were as happy as we had been on our honeymoon.

A telegram from Cam's mother turned our thoughts homeward.

"What did your mother mean by her telegram, "Arrangements completed," I asked.

"Secrets, darlingest," Cam told me boyishly, giving me an eager kiss.

I had almost forgotten about the closed door in the weeks I had been gone, but it still remained closed, and as much a mystery as before. I had even lost the key with which I had opened it.

One day I lay on the sun porch with a box of chocolates and a popular novel, famed more for its frothiness than

for any depth it could boast. Mother Brighton was ushered in. She kissed me affectionately but I sensed an undercurrent of excitement in her manner.

We talked of trivialities for a moment, then she opened her bag and drew out a key which she handed to me. My senses swam. I felt the room going round in circles, for the key resembled the one with which I had opened the door to the mystery room. Had I been caught in the act of prying and was this Mother Brighton's way of politely informing me that she knew? I turned a vivid crimson and I fear I was the picture of guilt. But Mother Brighton's poise was no better than mine. She took me in her arms and pressed me to her. "Rosamond, dear, you're the only daughter I ever had. You know the room at the head of the stairs? Open it, dear."

And with a hasty kiss on my forehead, she was gone, leaving me struggling for self-control.

For a long time I stood where she had left me, pondering. I had once opened that door and had found an empty room.

Slowly and with a strange reluctance, I mounted the stairs. I stood before the closed door. It seemed that the end of the world had come for me. A vague something impelled me to run away without opening it; to fling away the key; refuse utterly to solve the mystery.

But against all my inner promptings, I placed the key in the lock and turned it. I opened the door prepared to find, as before, an empty room. But, this time, it was not empty but completely furnished. The walls were tinted a dainty pink and paneled in cream with blue borders. Shimmering curtains were hung at the windows. I rushed through the first room, and opened the door to the smaller one. It was finished in the same tones as the first with a frieze of pink rabbits playing in gay procession round the walls. In a corner stood a lace-trimmed and ruffled—bassinet!

Then the full import of all it meant was borne in upon me. I stood there too dazed to move.

Instead of its being the happiest moment of my life, it left my heart leaden and dull. Oh, how I wished that this room could mean to me something more tangible than a symbol of blasted hopes. I wished now that I had fled without opening the door of this room. Better for me if it had remained empty of everything than for the aching emptiness which it now held and would always hold. I sank beside the bassinet and sobbed, but my broken heart knew no relief.

Cam found me here and raised me in his arms. "Why, honey-baby," he soothed, "aren't you happy? I'm the happiest man in the whole world, or will be soon." But I could only sob the harder.

Several months went by. I became thin and frail from nights sleepless with anxiety. Mother Brighton and Cam were very solicitous of me and watched over me with the most tender devotion.

One day Mother Brighton asked, "Aren't you going to do some sewing soon, Rosamond?"

I shook my head, I could not speak. I dared not. I knew what was expected of me. Oh, how much I longed to fulfill their hopes and my own.

Then Cam asked me one day, "Darlingest, hadn't you better see a doctor?"

I put my arms around his neck and tried to gain courage. "No, dear, not yet," I answered.

"Do you mean that we won't need the room upstairs for a time yet?"

I nodded.

"But, Rosamond dearest," he pleaded.

"Cam, give me time. I'm—a-fraid."

"Afraid!"

Was there a shade of contempt in his voice or did I, with

my overwrought nerves, imagine it? I dreaded anything that might take Cam from me. Hours of misery and dread—I suffered deeply every minute of the day.

Oh, those locked doors of our smoldering past! How little we know when those fires will be fanned into flames to consume us; and consuming us, flare forth to the world a secret we believed we had locked securely away from the prying gaze of a curious world. In reality, are there any locked doors or any dead fires?

Several more months went by.

I never passed by the door of the room at the end of the stairs without a feeling of dread, but also one of longing. It seemed as if tiny hands clutched at me, implored me, caressed me—the voices of my children crying for me to give them life and I could only deny them.

One rainy day Cam entered my boudoir and closed the door. His face bore a look of serious reproach. I put an arm around him, but he did not return my caress. Frightened, I waited for him to speak. A long moment, pregnant with dread, unbroken silence, save for the ticking of a porcelain clock on my dressing table. I envied those smiling Cupids that trailed pink roses round its shining whiteness. The ticking of the clock they so gayly bedecked meant little or nothing to them. To me it ticked off an eternity. They dwelt not behind locked doors—not they!

Cam's voice broke the stillness:

"Rosamond," he rarely called me by my name except when he was serious, and this use of my name only served to throw me into a fit of panic which I sought vainly to control, "Rosamond, we must come to an understanding—you must realize our position in a matter which, to you, has evidently been fraught with much fear. You probably are not aware that my inheritance from my father's estate depends absolutely upon my possession of a son and heir before the death of my mother."

"But Cam," I gasped, "why didn't you tell me——"

"I thought you were a good sport, Rosamond, and never doubted but what it would be the dearest wish of your heart."

"Before—we were married—" I finished with difficulty.

"Rosamond, people of our class do not put marriage on a farmyard basis. Between refined people those things are understood."

"I never would have married you if I had known," I wailed.

"Rosamond, do you realize what you are saying?" he demanded.

"Besides," I said peevishly, "you are putting our relations on a farmyard basis now."

Cam eyed me coldly. "This, my dear, is a more personal matter between you as my wife and myself as a member of society."

The hopelessness of my position drove me to despair.

"Yes, purely a business proposition," I said disdainfully. "I am to bear you a son and heir for which you receive a paltry inheritance of several millions, more or less. In other words, my offspring is to be coldly considered as so much livestock to be bartered for filthy gold. It's worse than farmyard eugenics—it's slavery!" I hissed at him.

Cam eyed me more coldly and walked out. As he reached the door, he turned and said:

"You're either a poor sport, Rosamond, or else you're—a coward."

The words hurt cruelly. I had either to accept his accusation, or else give him the key to those locked doors of the past. But, while I now had his contempt, I feared that one peep into that secret closet of my heart would bring him to hate me.

Cam and I lived in the same house for several weeks; he coming and going, but neither by word nor action did he

show that he knew I was there. When he passed me on the stairs, he looked through me and beyond. I was so numbed and paralyzed that I had ceased to feel.

Cam's mother called several times but I refused to see her. Her notes to me I returned unopened.

I realized suddenly that I must go mad if I had continued this existence. I knew not which way to turn, but after much pondering I decided to write Cam a letter and tell him the truth.

Five o'clock in the morning, and I had only succeeded in writing:

"Dear Cam, I would rather have you hate me than think of me as a coward—I——"

I did not know how or where to begin, but I knew that I had to write that letter.

What might be the aftermath mattered little to me in that frame of mind. Grimly I forced myself at last to put on paper what I had resolved never to tell. Each word I wrote shall remain forever in my brain, seared there as if in letters of fire.

> Cam: God knows how I long for a son and heir—a son of yours and mine, Cam dear. How my empty arms ache for the precious burden, how my heart cries out because I never shall—never can—hold a child of mine to my heart.
>
> Cam, I frittered away my birthright in my careless youth. I took the fragile gift of motherhood and laid it on the altar of my first love, who shattered it in the dust.
>
> How few girls realize what one careless step may cost them!
>
> And I do not mean an illegitimate child. Cam, that would be more welcome than the awful fate which befell me. Something one doesn't like to think about.

I was able, through a kindly physician friend of the family, to keep anyone, even my mother, from knowing and I thought I had locked the door upon my secret and lost the key.

When I recovered from a severe operation Dr. Wilson said, "You can never have a child. You wouldn't want to, of course, after this, but you never can, even if you did want to."

I was free of the terrible taint—my blood was clean, but the secret I have carried has been a heavy one.

Cam, I have forced open the lock, have bared my soul to you. I love you, dear. How I shall endure life without you, I do not know. I shall try to go on, freed of the load of deception, but forever regretting any sorrow which has burdened your life through me.

There are clean lovely women, Cam. Find one and be happy with her. I shall picture happy voices and toddling feet mounting the stairs and pink hands opening the door to the room at the end of the hall. To me a locked door—always. ROSAMOND.

I put the letter into an envelope and addressed it to Cam, in care of Mother Brighton.

Then I left the house—forever. Those pink, imploring hands beckoned a mournful farewell as I glanced up at the nursery windows, but I could not heed them. They had no power to draw me back. It was the end of the world to me.

I stood on the cliff above the ocean and watched the foamy spray as it dashed madly against the rocks. How I envied them the force and vehemence with which they could spend their fury in action. But underneath the dashing breakers I could detect a deadly calm and peace.

I leaned far out and, to my utter dismay, felt the edge of the cliff crumbling beneath me. My desire for death had been granted, it seemed.

I felt myself hurtled through the air. I went down—down—clutching wildly at the air. With a splash I struck a high-flung wave, and was caught by its white foamy arms. And all of a sudden, with death imminent, I realized that I did not desire to die. My expression had been more idle than I had imagined and I longed—above all else—to live. Life at its worst seemed very sweet. And then I was dashed against the shore and feeling no pain at the impact, I knew I had been killed.

Eons afterward, I was wakened by a light shining in my eyes. The sound of lapping waves and the distant roar of water lulled me momentarily back into the blackness from which I had come. I tried to move and a thousand pains shot through my body.

"So this is death," I thought and lay there.

A sudden wave washed over me and its icy chill recalled me to a full realization of being very much alive and at least on the borderland of the physical world.

Another and larger wave overwhelmed me and seemed to whisper in my ear. "You have not yet fulfilled your destiny."

With an effort I struggled to my feet and half walking, half crawling, managed to find my way round the face of the cliff and on to the highway where a passing car picked me up and took me to a hospital where I received treatment. A broken arm and a heavy cold were the only serious results of my fall.

After I left the hospital I could not return to my father's house, to answer the questions of my mother and sister.

I took a room in a quiet hotel until I could pick up the loose ends of my life and go on.

I had been at Briarmere Lodge all of two months when the maid brought me a letter. The name and address were typewritten. I did not open it immediately. I had received no mail since my arrival here and I wondered who could

have any business with me. When I did open it, my own handwriting stared me in the face. It was my letter of confession returned to me. There were two other sheets of paper—one a note from Mother Brighton. I read it through tear-dimmed eyes:

ROSAMOND DEAR:

Pardon an old lady's intrusion. I have read your confession to Cam. He has not, nor shall he ever, at my invitation.

My dear, the very regrettable incident should be buried. You have suffered, Rosamond, and paid—will pay in mental anguish all of your life, I know.

I loved you, dear. I still do, and so does Cam. I love Cam and cannot stand to see his life wrecked. I have the power to change the letter of his dead father's will.

Cam will be there soon, to bring you back home.

He loves you; we all love you. Come home, Rosamond!

Affectionately,
MOLLY BRIGHTON.

P. S.—The enclosed is a copy of a document which I asked our family physician to sign. It absolves you. Burn your confession before it is too late—M. B.

Dear Mother Brighton—the paper was a simple statement by the Brighton family physician stating that it would imperil my life were I to attempt to give a son and heir to Brighton Manor.

I was saved from my folly—a thing which I had never dared hope for; but something within me rebelled at a life of deceit which I would have to live if I went back to Cam. Oh, how I longed to burn that letter of confession. And yet my conscience forbade me.

I argued over and over with myself, "Have I a right to

tell Cam and destroy his happiness for the sake of my own peace of mind? Men don't tell. Why should a woman? Is it only the woman who must pay for her folly in confession?

"It is only selfishness that prompts you to tell," my heart reproached me.

All night I tried to come to some decision. I wanted to be fair to Cam. I wanted to be fair to myself.

I was awakened by voices in the hall. Cam's voice! I jumped out of bed. There lay my letter which Mother Brighton had returned to me. In a moment it would be too late to destroy it. "You must send him away," my accusing conscience dictated.

But my heart cried out, "Burn your confession."

Cam was at the door, knocking. How I longed for him!

Quickly I tore my letter in shreds and threw the bits of paper into the hearth. By that act I had chosen to live behind locked doors—forever. Foreign keys might grate in the lock, might turn and unlock them—almost. Would startle me, sometimes, by their clanking, but I alone, could unlock them and I had chosen to lose the key. And no matter how much I might desire to open them, I never could.

I owed much to life, I knew, and I felt very unworthy. My gratitude at my release was very great. I resolved to fill my days in the future very full of love and kindness so that those keys turning, turning, in the lock could hold no terror in the dark nights. I must make up to Fate for her mitigation of my sentence.

Somewhere, somehow, I would seek to atone gloriously. I dedicated myself, solemnly, in that moment, to strive daily to walk more uprightly and to bring happiness to Cam and to those others to whom life had been less kind than it had been to me.

I opened the door—Cam was there and he held me at arm's length, his face filled with love.

"Sweetness," he whispered.

"Cam, I'm so happy," I said humbly, filled with my own unworthiness.

And though I sensed that darkness would seek to engulf me again and again and those keys would grate harshly at times, I knew that my earnest desire and dedication of my life would keep forever burning that light within, to guide me toward my goal of loving service. And—perhaps—in some distant future—my garments might again be washed white and shining.

IX

My Tower of Happiness

I'M GOING to tell you my story, not because it is so very much different from anyone else's or because I think it the most interesting experience that could possibly happen, but because I think it shows that where two people love each other and try to do what's right it won't make a mite of difference if the whole world turns topsy-turvy, they'll get together at last and be happy.

My name is Mary Smith, not May nor Marie nor Mamie but Mary, an old-fashioned name good for every-day wear and honest as daylight. That is, Mary Smith *was* my name —it's Mary Fisher now—and I don't believe the time can ever come that I'll be sorry I changed it.

When I first met my husband I was a clerk in Howe and Goodwin's big department store, and the store was rather old-fashioned, too. Of course, they kept up-to-date articles, but you'd never find a cheaply made thing in stock. Everything was good and you could depend upon its being just as the clerk represented it to be. They never held "Bargain Sales" in which goods were marked up and then marked down and sold for more on the bargain table than had been asked when in regular stock.

I was selling men's hosiery and neckties. I liked the counter and thought I had one of the nicest places in the store and, say, you were treated white by that firm every day in the week. I'd been there about six months when a young fellow came up to me and asked for some socks. Every-day wear, he said, something he couldn't poke his toes through the first time he slipped them on.

He was finicky, didn't want to be suited, I thought, but finally he bought just one pair and went away. I was a little disappointed, for usually when a man makes a fuss over what he buys he'll order a dozen. But after fussing with this man for fifteen minutes I had only a thirty-nine-cent sale. The next day he came again, said he wanted another pair just like that he'd bought the day before, but he fussed and fussed and looked at me; he'd open his mouth as if to speak and then close it again without saying a word. Finally when he had his change and his parcel and nothing to keep him any longer, he said to me, hesitating-like:

"I may want some more of these and, if you'd give me your name and I'd come again and you're not here, I could —I could—I might ask for you. I believe I'd like to have you wait on me."

He seemed embarrassed and acted kind of funny and blushed, yes, actually blushed, when I looked at him. For a minute I didn't say anything and then I answered, cool as could be:

"My number is on your sales slip and I'm always ready to wait on customers. It's what I'm paid for."

Then he blushed again and went away and I didn't see him for a week. But early one morning, almost as soon as the store had opened, there he was at my table and this time he bought three pairs of those same socks. In another week he was back again. Funny, I thought, three pairs of socks a week, good serviceable hose, too. He couldn't possibly wear them out unless he traveled in his stocking feet.

That was the way it went, every week a couple of pairs, maybe three, and a necktie, until I wondered what he did with them. I grew to look for him, and if he was a little late coming in, or if he changed the day, I was disappointed. I liked him and I'm not one of the kind that thinks a man is the only thing a girl ought to look at. I'd rather have a

good time with a girl any day in the week. Take the right kind of a girl and I'll trust her till the moon turns into a gold mine and the man in it lets down a silver ladder for me to climb up and begin digging. But you can't be sure about men.

It went on this way for nearly two months, and then, one night, when the store closed and I stepped out on the sidewalk from the employees' entrance, there he was, standing close up to the building, holding an umbrella. The rain was coming down and there I was, no umbrella, no wrap, and a new spring hat that had cost all I'd been able to save in six weeks.

He stepped right up the minute he saw me and said, hesitating-like, holding the umbrella over my hat:

"My car's parked right around the corner. If you'd let me——"

Let him? "You've saved my life," I answered and stepped closer to him. "My hat'd be plumb ruined."

It wasn't much of a car. I'd made fun of a tin lizzie more than once and this was a cut-down with no top. But he helped me in and covered me up snug with a rubber mackintosh, and I held the umbrella close down over my hat while he steered the thing onto a side street where the traffic wasn't so dense, and then away we went. When I reached home, the least I could do was to ask him in till it stopped beating down. I lived clear out in the suburbs, yet I hadn't spoiled my hat a particle.

That was the beginning and soon it was a regular thing for him to meet me at the store and take me home. Saturday afternoons we'd go out into the country or down to the beach.

I remember the last Sunday we went out together, he was so quiet, acted so sort of downcast, and yet not as if he was worried about anything, that I laughed at him and asked him if he was tired of taking me out every Sunday.

I told him I'd find him another girl if he wanted me to. But the look he gave me shut me up, tighter than any words could have done. I saw he had something on his mind and I wasn't going to be any kind of a digger, not if I knew myself.

Pretty soon he told me—said he was tired of working for the other fellow; he wanted to work for himself and he was going away. He'd heard of openings in a couple of places outside of the city and wanted to know if, when he'd settled things, he could come and get me and we'd be married.

"Sure," I told him, joking-like. "I'll marry you now and we'll go hunting a job together."

"When I get a wife," he answered, positive and calm, "I'm going to be able to take care of her right. We're going to have a nice little home and she's going to own it and there's going to be flowers and trees and everything of that sort. Isn't that what you want, Mary?"

He was so earnest about it that I quieted. So I promised him and, as it was growing dark, we went home, if you can call a furnished room a home. Another girl and I lived together in a couple of boxes the landlady called an "apartment," and we took turns doing the housework. So that night I made chocolate, and I'd baked a cake and made a fruit salad beforehand, and the three of us had a good time together.

Funny, isn't it, how things will move along, week after week, calm as a duck pond in August. Then, the first thing you know, trouble will begin to pile up, first one thing and then another, until you're fairly swamped with anxiety. It makes me think of a line in an old hymn, "When sorrows like sea billows roll." Well, that is the way it happened to me after Auston went away. That was his name, Auston Fisher. I missed him more than I ever imagined I could miss anybody unless it was my mother. I felt just the same when she died and left me alone.

Soon after Auston went away, the girl who shared the apartment with me went west to visit a sister. That threw all the rent onto me until I could get another chum, and chums are harder to find than millionaires behind a bargain table. Then one Sunday I asked Lottie Akers, a girl who clerked in the millinery, if she didn't want to take a trip into the country with me and, as she had been raised on a Vermont farm, she was only too glad of the chance. So we packed our lunch and went out to where Auston and I used to spend Sundays—a great, high point overlooking the river where scarcely anyone ever thought of going and we had the view all to ourselves. It was a climb, I'm telling you, and I found it some different going it alone from what it was with Auston to help me, but we made it after a pretty stiff pull and there we sat and talked and loafed until time to go home. Going down the hill my foot slipped and I tumbled; I thought I'd never reach bottom and when I did I just lay still, I couldn't have moved, not even if a bull had been chasing me. Lottie had to go for help and finally a man came from a farmhouse a little ways off and they managed to get me into a truck on a blanket and into a hospital in the city.

It was six weeks before I could sit up and in all that time I had not heard from Auston. In the last letter I had received from him, a day or so before I was hurt, he had told me that his movements would be uncertain and that I should not write until he sent me another address. So there I was, sick in the hospital, no way of writing to him and no letters reaching me. I tried to think it was all right, but when day after day went by I began to wonder if he was really the kind of man I had thought he was. Little doubts would creep in, specially nights when I couldn't sleep for pain in my broken bones, and when I left the hospital at last, I had no money, no job, and no place to go. Life looked all storm and no sunshine, and if it hadn't been

for Lottie I'd surely been up against it. But she took me home with her and then I tramped the streets looking for work, but there was nothing doing.

Times were hard, business dull, no opening anywhere, and store work was the only thing I had experience with. Even Lottie had been laid off, but she landed a place, temporary, of course, in a ballyhoo, cheap-John store where they advertised big bargains, fire sales, going-out-of-business sales, and everything else that would pull a crowd of the cheapest people. It was a bargain counter job all right, but anything is better than nothing, and when Lottie told me one evening that she had landed me a job, I sure was one happy girl.

All the while there was no word from Auston. He'd dropped out as though he'd skipped the country. I'd gone over to my old apartment and talked with the landlady and told her if any mail came to send it to Lottie's, but she was one of the snippy kind and seeing her hadn't cheered me any.

But I had a job even if it was in a store patronized by women who ate garlic and needed bathing, men who reeked of tobacco and every other imaginable smell. The way they crowded and shoved around the table where I was selling cotton hosiery would have given a football team lessons in rough-necking. Gee, it was awful and I had endured it for a week when one day I made a mistake and gave the wrong customer the change from a twenty-dollar bill. At least she said I did, but I always thought it was a scheme the two of them worked to get money. I'm not sure, but I was called into the office and given my discharge and they wouldn't even pay me for the week I'd worked. I went down into the girls' dressing room and wrote a note and sent it to Lottie and told her. You'd never guess in a thousand years what happened then. That girl told another what had been done, she passed it on, and they began to take up a collection for me. Lottie had sent me word to

stay in the dressing room till closing time, and when I saw her she threw a little pile of silver in my lap and said:

"There, kid, that's yours. Take it and go out in the country and stay till business picks up. Or go up in Vermont and stay with Mother till I send for you. There's cash enough for car fare."

What do you think of that? What'd I tell you about girls? If you're on the square they'll stand by you till you're bald-headed, deaf and dumb, but I knew every girl working in that joint needed every dime they'd got and I felt I couldn't touch it. And I said so.

"Nothing doing," they told me and Lottie insisted that I should visit her mother. Said she'd been writing her about me and, from what her mother had answered, she knew I'd be more than welcome. I left the store with a dozen girls hanging around me and Lottie grabbing my arm as though she thought I might fade away.

Then, what do you think? As we came out the door that was the employees' entrance to the dump, there was Auston standing close to the door and staring at every girl who showed her face outside. The minute he saw me his eyes lighted up till his whole face shone. He grabbed my arm till it hurt and breathed:

"Mary."

That was all but it told more than a whole lecture. I didn't say a word, just stood there holding up traffic and looking at him. He pulled me to one side and Lottie followed and all the girls just crowded around.

"I've hunted heaven and hell over to find you, Mary," he said, and I laughed, and I guess that laugh sounded more like a crying, I was so glad.

"She's been both places," Lottie told him, and he gave another look in my face.

"She looks it," he answered and then he said to me:

"Car's just around the corner. There's room for one

more beside you and me. We're going to be married. Who do you want with you?"

But Lottie spoke up quickly, "Mary isn't going to be married any such a way. She's going home with me now, and if you want her and she wants you, you can come along and we'll talk things over."

I spoke up then. I'd been too happy and too flustered to speak before, but now I said:

"Lottie's right, Auston. Come home with us and we'll talk things over."

At that he led us to his car. Not the little old cut-down, but one of the niftiest roadsters I'd ever seen, painted green and gray, with all the fixings one could think of. He helped us in and then asked:

"Where away?"

Maybe we weren't a happy crowd that evening. Auston told how he'd written and written, and never a word from me. He was so busy he couldn't get away, but had to wait till he'd got things fixed up as he wanted them. When I asked him about the new car he laughed.

"That old cut-down was something I used for bumming around in, and I had a notion that a girl who cared enough for me to ride in that and enjoy herself would make the right kind of a wife. It's standing beside our garage about three hundred miles from here. We'll have many a ride in it yet, Mary."

We were married the next day. Then Auston went to that cheap-John firm and made them pay me for my week's work. "It's yours, you earned it, and you're going to have it," he told me. "You can buy Christmas candy with it or give it to Lottie, but you're going to get it. It's yours."

He told me that, while he couldn't understand why I didn't write, he never doubted me for a minute. "A girl named Mary Smith and proud of her name is all right," he said, "but Mary Fisher sounds a heap better to me."

So there we are. We've got a nice home, a good income, and we always save something for the future. Lottie spends her vacations with us or sometimes we all go up to her mother's in Vermont. But Auston is still wearing socks he bought of me at Howe and Goodwin's department store.

X

My Forbidden Lover

ERE by the window of my tiny New York apartment I am watching for the sunrise. The gray sky is beginning to turn to a soft rose-pink. For hours I have been huddled among the cushions of the big chair, and trying to be glad that I have been brave.

I was brave, very brave, last night. This morning, I am frightened and lonely.

In the next room my daughters will soon awake and call for "mother" to come and help them with their dressing. My dear little daughters; Ann, eight, and Grace, six. I shall go to them, and we will make a game of our dressing, a contest to see who does it quickest and best. Then we will have our gay little breakfast from the blue butterfly china, and the bus will come to take them to school. And I shall make myself trim and businesslike, and go down into the market place, there to sit all day in a dim, quiet office, writing, writing, writing.

At five, I shall return. My daughters will have reached home before me, and will have started the simple preparations for our dinner, which is the social event of the day. We will be merry and bright as we dine, and each will tell of all the interesting things that have occurred during the hours since breakfast.

Then we shall hurriedly put the food away, and go out for the walk which is our daily recreation. On our return, there will be lessons, some music, a story; then baths and bed for the children. Then the usual household tasks that every woman loves to do, the planning of the coming day,

the careful attention to the clothing, a few letters, a bit of reading, then bath and bed for "mother." So it will go on —day after day—until they are through school. Then they will marry and after that what will there be for me? But it *had* to be.

Four years ago, their father died. After awhile I decided to come to the city because of its better opportunities for suitable work for me, and its better schools for the children. Harold had left me a little life insurance, as much as he had been able to afford, and I had invested it well, but I could not live and educate my children on the income. So we brought our pretty household things, and came to seek a new home.

I had found this cozy apartment in a quiet neighborhood, and we had settled. We made no acquaintances, as there was no time for social life.

We were working for a purpose, but we had very happy times together. The children had companionship in school, I had my work. We had good fresh air, and lots of sunlight, wholesome food and beauty, within our home—and without. We lived near the most beautiful river in the world. So we had stayed on year after year.

The school is not very far away, and a private bus calls for the children. A subway station is within pleasant walking distance. A few minutes, and the train takes me to my office. We are very comfortable.

A few months after we were settled in our apartment, the postman brought me a letter with a foreign stamp. It was from a man of whom I had many times heard my husband speak. A man who had been his best friend in college. But because he had been sent abroad to represent his firm in Europe, I had never seen him since my marriage.

But I knew him so well from the constant references which Harold had made to their boyhood and young manhood days, that he seemed very near to me. His letter was

to express his deep sorrow and sympathy, and to say that he would soon be returning to the States to remain.

I answered the letter, and he wrote many times and at last he came to see us. The children and I welcomed him gladly and he accepted our invitation to dinner. By the end of the evening he had won our hearts.

The children had been taught to say Uncle Earl, and he and I had fallen perfectly naturally into the use of first names.

That first evening with Earl was the beginning of a new and interesting life for the children and me. He told me that his wife was a confirmed invalid, and never left her room, so she could not accept the invitation I had extended to her, but that he would always look us up whenever he came to the city, which must be about once a month, if business continued as at present. In the meantime, would I do him the favor of calling on him for any help or service that a brother, had either Harold or I possessed one, would give me. Might he be a real "Uncle Earl" to the children?

Well, no one who has not felt the need of a strong helping hand and head can realize what this friendship has meant to me—to my children. Every four or five weeks we would get a telegram, saying that he was coming and asking us to meet him down town for dinner. This would be followed by a play or a musical comedy, and then a drive through the park to our home. It was our one dissipation, and I was young enough to be as thrilled by all this as were the children.

I had loved my husband deeply and truly; his sudden death nearly killed me, but I had to be father and mother both to my children, and I would not darken their childhood with sadness, so I tried to be cheerful and gay with them always. They hardly remembered their father so when Uncle Earl came into their lives, they lavished all the love of father on him. He returned it. He never forgot a birth-

day nor a holiday. He filled their lives full of gladness.

Before he had been coming to see us a year, I knew that I loved him with a stronger love than I had ever known. We were absolutely congenial. When I received a telegram, my whole day would be one of thrilling adventure. Nothing could be hard or tiresome. There was a song of gladness in my heart. I would hurry home from the office, dress my daughters and myself in our prettiest things and call a taxi. Always he was waiting in front of the hotel, to greet us and to pay the driver. There were never any cares when he was with us. We would sit down to the gayest of dinners. As soon as we were through dining, away we would whirl to the best play or musical show, then the long lovely drive home through the park.

He always came in with us, and after the children were snugly tucked in bed, Earl and I would sit before the little gas log fire and talk of the things which only men and women who care for each other would find of interest. But there was never a kiss, never a word of love.

At midnight we would go to the tiny kitchen to get a bit of supper, and play at keeping house. It was such fun, but we always laughed softly so as not to disturb the children. He would insist on helping me put everything in order, and then he would say good-by and run away.

I would hurry into bed as fast as I could, so that I could shut my eyes and live over and over every moment of the past few hours.

I knew that he loved me. I knew that I loved him. But I never expected that we would tell each other. We were just dear friends.

Yesterday morning, his telegram came. Would we meet him at the usual time and place?

I had known that he would be coming soon, and I had bought a new gown; my first bit of color. I had lived in black ever since Harold died, because it was not so expen-

sive as light things. But for once I had been wildly extravagant. As soon as I could leave my desk, I rushed home and told Ann and Grace.

We dressed in wild glee. My gown was a deep wine-red, and I had stopped at a florist's and bought a corsage of pink sweet peas.

The children were lovely in simple white frocks, with their golden curls and dainty accessories. I flushed and smiled with pleasure at the look of admiration on Earl's face as he helped us from the taxi.

We ate in the Green Room as usual, and the orchestra played the music from *Madame Butterfly*. I was too happy to talk, but the children were bubbling over with joy of having Uncle Earl to visit with, and I quietly watched the trio through a haze of happiness.

Dinner was followed by a musical comedy; then the drive home, with bed for tired little girls; then the quiet, fireside talk for us.

When we were alone, Earl moved the big wing chair to the fireside, and for the first time drew me down to sit beside him in its deep, wide recess. "I want to talk to you, Evelyn," he said, "and while I talk, I want to feel you near me."

I nestled in the crook of his arm and waited, thrilling with joy at the contact of his warm, strong body.

"To begin with," he continued, "I am going to tell you something you already know, I love you. You think it's a brother's love. It is not. I love you passionately, madly, tenderly. I want you for my wife, and I cannot have you."

Tears were struggling for expression, but I shut my eyes and kept them back. I must be brave for his sake.

He went on in his soft, deep voice. "You have never seen my wife, I have never told you that after the birth of our twins, she suffered a stroke, which not only made her helpless bodily, but left her with the mind of a child. That

happened twelve years ago; we have never been husband and wife since.

"Her mother and sister came to live in our house. They have cared for her, and have brought up my son and daughter. I have prospered, and have been able to repay them, so far as money will repay. They shall never want for anything. It is impossible for me to divorce Martha, even though I must stay bound to a living death, until God Himself severs the cord." He paused and for long moments he held me close to his heart while we softly wept together.

He was first to recover and to take up the thread of the story:

"The thing I am going to say to you is not in any way an insult. It is the only tribute I am able to render. I know you will understand. I want you to become my wife in everything but name, I am rich; I can, and will, provide for you and your children for all time to come.

"I want you to take a larger apartment where there will be room for me when I come, for I want to come to live with you, to be your husband, and father of your children.

"Martha is strong, and will probably outlive both you and me. If she does not, I shall ask you to marry me the moment I am free, but we dare not count on that event. We *must* face the situation frankly. It will require courage.

"But here, in this great city, no one would have to know. You could keep your position, and have a maid. No one would question. We might even keep the knowledge of our relations from Ann and Grace. At least, for years to come. We shall always love each other."

"Yes," I sobbed, "always."

He waited in silence.

Half an hour ticked away by the clock on the mantel, while I sat beside him with closed eyes, trying to think it all out. I must decide.

On one hand lay the sheltered, sunny road to happiness with the man I loved. I would so gladly accept the portion of his life that was his to give. But there were my daughters. Even though they did not know for years, the time would come when they would know. They would find that I had lived a lie throughout their childhood; that I had been the mistress of their uncle, and not the mother they believed me to be. No! I could not pay that price for happiness.

I arose from the chair and held out my hand.

"Come," I said.

Together we crossed the narrow hall and entered the room where my precious children were sleeping. There they lay, side by side, tranquillity written on their sweet faces.

I slipped my arm through his, drew him close to me, "I love you, Earl," I said, "but what about them? They did not ask to be born. I must be true to them. This is my answer."

Wildly he caught me to his breast, and covered my face, my hair, and my throat with tender kisses, then with a stifled groan he said good-by and left the room.

I sank to my knees beside the white bed and waited, too bitterly wretched to pray. I heard him get his coat and hat and leave the apartment.

And then I came in here to sit by the window. Maybe the sun will help to dispel this dreadful loneliness.

Oh, God, help me smilingly to face to-day. And to-morrow—and to-morrow!

XI

His Butterfly Wife

ESTERDAY Harold, my son, was twenty-one, and home from college for that eventful occasion. For years I had planned to tell him a story. It had been in my mind by day, and often in the still hours of the night I would rehearse the words with which it would be told. My main idea in life was the telling of it; yet—the day came and went, and the story was not told and never will be—to him. For a great truth was borne in upon me; one to which I had wilfully closed my eyes, but now was forced to recognize, namely: "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

And this is the story:

Twenty-four years ago Alice Sutherland was the prettiest, the wittiest and the most heartless girl of our set. A perfect example of the coquette or flirt, we laughingly called her Butterfly, a name she seemed to enjoy as she flitted from one pleasure to another, refusing to take anything or anyone seriously.

The daughter of a wealthy man, but one of a number of children, she realized that her inheritance would amount to very little; still she could not give up the accustomed luxuries, and was fully determined to marry for money.

Of this I learned later. At that time I was as madly in love with her as were all the other men who knew her; and when she seemed to reciprocate my feeling for her, my ecstasy knew no bounds. Having known her for years, and knowing her reputation for cold-heartedness perfectly, still I did not realize what that meant. Or, as is the

common egotism of men, I though it would melt before the ardor of my love. It pleased me all the more to think she was cold to all others, but would respond to me. It did not trouble me even that the response did not come during our courtship and engagement; I thought it but a mark of her purity and was further gratified.

But after our marriage it was quite another matter to have her remain indifferent to my passionate adoration of her. Moreover, she could not understand my failure to be completely satisfied with what she gave. She never sensed the fact that a man loves a woman's soul far, far more than the body; that the latter is sacred and dear to him simply because of the former.

Of course, I did not realize all of this at once, or at first. Those few first months I was blinded to all else by the power of my love and the joy of possession. But such love cannot last without something to feed upon. Add to this the fact that Alice continued her flirtations, feeling greatly aggrieved if I remonstrated with her for the affairs in which she indulged. Naturally, I am of a very jealous disposition, and he who claims that one loves best that person of whom one is kept uncertain or jealous, simply does not know whereof he speaks. Jealousy can very soon kill love. With me, the knowledge that Alice deliberately did something of which I disapproved, knowing it hurt and humiliated me, soon caused me to feel the pain less, though the humiliation endured. Had I not known that she was incapable of real indiscretions because of a certain hard, calculating selfishness, my position would have been unendurable.

But to her, men were only pawns in a fascinating game; she moved them at her own caprice, using the lure of her beautiful body and the wiles known only to a finished coquette, willfully inflicting pain just to see its effect upon her victims.

Our quarrels were many and bitter before indifference came to my aid. Then, soon after the birth of our son, there was a brief flare-up of the old devotion; it was quickly extinguished when I saw that the baby was to make no change in the mother's mode of life. Giving him into the care of a nurse she continued her social activities.

"You are the type of a woman that should never marry," I told her rather bitterly one time. "Why did you marry, and, more particularly, why did you marry me?"

"And are you all this long time finding it out?" she asked laughingly. "I had to marry because father could not leave me a fortune, and I had to have one to live as I wished. As for you, you had more money than my other suitors, and more ability for making money."

Quite a pleasing confession to a husband who had foolishly deluded himself into the belief that he had married for love!

Could nothing touch her, I wondered.

There was the affair with Teddy Graham, an upright, honest young fellow who had come from the East to study law with his uncle, Judge Graham, and had promptly fallen in love with my wife. As usual he was encouraged and, manly young fellow that he was, he came to me.

"Sir," he said to me, though it must have been the hardest speech he ever made in his life, "Mrs. Ray and I find that we love each other, and I cannot let you remain in ignorance of it. I have no wish to be clandestine or underhanded about anything, more especially about this love of ours, which I regard as a sacred thing; it must be kept so. We thought by putting the matter before you that you would consent to a divorce with as little publicity as possible, for surely you would not wish to hold a wife against her will—after she ceased to care."

I could not refrain from laughing, at which a pained expression appeared on the young man's face. I extended my hand.

"Excuse my levity," I begged, "and let me assure you of my respect and admiration for you; it took real manhood to do as you have done, and I appreciate it. But let me ask you one question. Did my wife know you were coming to me?"

He flushed, still unable to understand my attitude.

"No," he answered, "but she knows my feelings about the matter. She confessed her love for me. Believe me,"—in hasty explanation—"it was no fault of hers; we were both—well—swept off our feet, so to say. We regretted even that. But it was an irresistible force that caused me to speak— I take all the blame, Mr. Ray.

"After that, the next thing was to see you."

Again I laughed.

"Then let me burst your bubble of young love, my dear Mr. Graham. It may seem cruel, but it is kinder in the long run. My wife is always confessing love for some unfortunate victim of hers—and laughing at him later. With her it is just a game, and she will be indignant at your taking it seriously. That is not among the rules of her game at all, as she would very quickly tell you. Those that play according to her rules are the most popular with her. She has no idea in the world of leaving me, because I am giving her everything she cares for. Long ago I gave her love, too." To save me I could not keep the bitterness from my voice. "She did not care for that, so it gradually died. Our present relations suit her better. I am a good-natured chap; where other men might raise a row I've learned to laugh. She has absolute freedom with me, and more money than any other woman of her acquaintance, so she is content.

"Now if you don't believe me, just test her out for yourself."

His face had gradually whitened until I was sorry for the poor chap and, without a word, he turned and went

away. The look in his eyes worried me, and I was not at all surprised a week later, to learn that he had shot himself. He tried Alice out, and on learning of her duplicity, had killed himself. She was much perturbed, but not in the way most women would have been; it was more anger than any other emotion.

"The fool!" she cried. "Why did he want to be so serious about everything? I was not to blame"—in answer to my accusation—"everyone flirts—or nearly everyone—and they have sense enough to know it means nothing at all."

The incident did not, as I had hoped it might, sober her. She actually seemed to think it a breach of good form that poor Ted had left her in the middle of the season with no one to "rush" her, and subject to the criticism of her set, for there were some not so far lost to the decencies of life that they could not see the truth of the affair, and place the blame where it belonged.

Still, as in duty bound so long as she remained my wife, I made excuses for Alice when the matter was discreetly mentioned in my hearing.

There were numerous other cases, some of them hardly less tragic than this one, for who can tell how many men are started on the downward road by a flirtatious woman? How many illusions destroyed, how many homes wrecked, how many ideals shattered? Naturally, Alice had few friends among her own sex, but to that she was as indifferent as she was to the other wholesome enjoyments of a woman's life.

There came a time, though, when she met her Waterloo, in the person of Tom Allison, a newly rich oil man who breezed in from no one knew exactly where, a rounder if there ever was one and wholly without attractions so far as I could see. I looked at him with no eye of jealousy, having long since passed that stage. Alice's heart affairs,

so long as they did not reach a point reflecting upon my name, went unnoticed by me.

But this fellow, uncouth, loud, ignorant—what any woman with refined rearing could see about him passed my comprehension. I can explain his fascination for Alice only by the well-known fact that with some women the brute in a man is the attracting quality. Women of this class cannot appreciate gentleness and kindness but, given a man who will trample upon them, who will abuse and dominate them, who, in fact will be the cave man, they will give him a devotion that is the wonder of prosaic, civilized men who believe in treating womenfolk with courtesy and consideration.

Whatever the reason, Alice seemed under a spell where this man was concerned, and for the first time I felt called upon to warn her. I knew his type. Contrary to her usual anger at my "interference," she received my lecture with an air of subdued quiet far more alarming than the familiar outburst I had expected.

Several weeks later she asked me to divorce her, and I refused.

"In the first place I do not believe in divorce," I told her. "The men of my family do not marry women either to leave them or to be left. With us, marriage is truly 'until death us do part.'

"But there are other reasons why I will not divorce you. One is that you have caused me to live without love, and now that I have a chance to retaliate I shall avail myself of it. To your own hurt you have always been given what you want, but this you shall not have. It shall never be said to my son that he is the child of divorced parents, and because you are his mother I am going to take care of you in spite of yourself. How long do you suppose Tom Allison would remain true to you once you were in his power?"

That last question she put to proof by eloping with her

lover a few days later. One triumphant, malicious letter I received, and then for a year was complete silence.

As I had done before, I sought to conceal this misdemeanor from our acquaintances. I told first that Mrs. Ray had gone for a visit with her parents, and when her absence was prolonged, I took my lawyer into my confidence, telling him to let me know at once if my wife should return. To the public it was given out that we were abroad; and then, with one of my sisters, and a nurse to care for baby Harold, I really went abroad.

It was a year before I was summoned home by Alice's return. At last a subdued and repentant Alice, crushed in spirit and frail in health, with a tiny infant at her breast.

Tom? He had disappeared months before; and, true to her butterfly nature, Alice had not known what to do or where to go after the disappearance of her funds.

Sheltered and cared for all her life she was utterly helpless without some stronger individual to lean upon; as a last resort she turned to me.

No hint from my lawyer was needed to keep her from the prying eyes of neighbors and friends; she was only too glad to find a refuge in the home once graced by her lovely presence, later scorned and desecrated, and never until now appreciated. Uncertain of what I might do or say, she was glad to remain hidden until my return, having her material wants satisfied.

And I? I pose as neither a martyr nor a saint; indeed there are some who might think me rather a cruel jailer.

I only know there is some stern quality in me that stayed by me all this while. Never once did it occur to me to divorce Alice; she was my wife "for better, for worse." That it had turned out for worse was no excuse to break my word. She was the same woman I had married, and it was not her fault at that time I had idealized her into something she was not.

Therefore I forgave her and provided for her as before. It would have been more than any ordinary man could do to live with her again as his wife, so we lived apart. Her little girl grew into a beautiful, lovable child and she, as well as everyone else, believes that I am her father. I think no one ever suspected that Alice was not with us the whole time we were away.

In every way Alice was a changed woman. Could she have become so earlier, our lives might have been very happy together. I had never thought she would develop into a self-sacrificing, devoted mother; her every thought was of the children, so Harold has nothing to remember of her but perfect mother love.

Only once she tried to bring about a reconciliation between us. Then in a trembling, hesitant manner, utterly unlike her old arrogant self, she asked if there was any possibility of my ever loving her, of taking her as my wife again. Something of the repulsion I felt at the idea must have shown in my face, for she shrank away as if I had struck her and cried:

"No, don't answer, Frank, I see! I see! Too late I've learned your value, dear! Too late I've learned what true love is. But don't put your feeling for me into words—I couldn't stand it!"

I think she must have suspected what was a fact; that I had fallen in love elsewhere. One could not have spent a year, as I did, in the company of sweet, true-hearted, little Helen Dweyer, Harold's nurse, without loving her. She was in every sense of the word a true woman, and I had come to love her with every fiber of my being, though with no idea of ever being more than a friend to her. But knowing me as she did, Alice shrewdly put a number of small insignificant happenings together and arrived at the truth, which I would not deny.

"You love her!" she cried one day when Harold had

brought me a snapshot of his "Sweet Nuss Dweyer" as he called her, and I was looking at it with more of a betrayal in my features than I had any idea of, I guess.

"And why not?" I demanded. "I am only human, Alice, and you will remember I've had no wife for years; in fact I never had one.

"I am not ashamed of loving a pure, beautiful-souled girl like Miss Dweyer. My love will hurt no one, and it is very precious to me."

"And does she know of it and love you in return?"

"No. You have no right, I think, to ask those questions; but since you do, I don't mind telling you that she does not, and never will, know. I am not one who can make a game of love, my dear. I could find no happiness in less than all, and that is impossible."

"You are a good man, Frank," she then said. "Why don't you divorce me and find the happiness you deserve? I wish you would."

"You know my opinions there," I told her, "and I am not complaining. You and I at least understand each other now, and that is more than we did in the old days. We have peace and plenty, so let us ask nothing more."

I've often regretted that conversation, for the next morning the maid ran to me in terror, "Mrs. Alice is dead! Someone has murdered her!"

She was dead. But the hand that did the awful deed was her own. How she had nerved herself to the act I can't guess, but with a razor she had severed the jugular vein, cutting so deep a gash that her pretty head had fallen far back on the pillow that was soaked with her life-blood. A note to me said:

> I am making the blood atonement, Frank. Somewhere, a long time ago, I read, "We sin with kisses, but we must atone with blood," and I feel that it is

what I must do. No need in asking you to be good to the children—you could not be anything else—so I have no final instructions to leave. Forgive me and forget me, and try to be happy.

The poor little Butterfly! All the velvety softness and beauty gone, lying there crushed, and with discolored, mire-stained, broken wings—a thing to be pitied only.

A year later I married Helen Dweyer, and we have been marvelously happy together. She is everything a man could desire in a wife, and we have two adorable children to add to our joys.

But, knowing the tainted blood which was Harold's heritage, I had spent many an hour in planning how best to safeguard him, and had at last decided that the best and surest way would be to place before him the story of his mother's life and give him her last note. This was the story I had for him on his birthday.

I called him into the library and asked him to be seated opposite me where I could watch his face.

Above the mantel there is a picture of Alice, life-size, painted by a well-known artist whom I had engaged for the work during our early married life. It is a real work of art, breath-taking in its loveliness, even to one who had not known the original. As Harold sat down his eyes fell upon this painting, and his face softened into lines of the utmost tenderness.

"Dear little mother," he said, "do you know, Dad, I can never thank you enough for giving me such a mother as she was. I visit other boys in their homes, and while some of them have splendid mothers, never have I found one that could compare with mine."

I rose to adjust the logs in the grate and surreptitiously dropped the note, proof of Alice's folly, into the glowing coals.